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MARGARET

AND

HER BRIDESMAIDS.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF "WOMAN'S DEVOTION."

"Queen Rose of the Rosebud garden of girls."—TENNYSON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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MARGARET

AND HER BRIDESMAIDS.

CHAPTER I.

Mrs. Laird did not understand Lotty's character yet. After that first emotion, she showed no more. There was a quiet air of content about her, that provoked Mrs. Laird beyond measure. She talked of Philip in a manner as serene and cheerful as if he were still up stairs, and wrote all her letters, and arranged all his affairs without a tear. She seemed rather sorry when she heard that Madame La Luce's leg was broken, and it was feared she would be lame for life.

"Poor thing!" murmured Lotty.

"Puir thing, indeed! aye, bairn; but I misdoubt grief has turned yer brain, spaking in thon daft way."

"Is she not to be pitied, Mrs. Laird? I think so, for many reasons."

"Hoot awa! set her oop i' the cutty stuil, and I wadna pity her; she letten yer bonny Philip dee in that awfu way, and no in his bed, like a guid Christian."

"But still she is to be pitied," persisted Lotty. "Philip is happy, and what is she?"

"Weel awa! ye're past my kenning. When div ye think ye'll hear fra your friends?"

"In three days now, I hope," said Lotty; "and then you will lose your plague and torment, Mrs. Laird," kissing her.

"Eh! bairn, ye hae coaxing ways, and we a' your queer doings, I am like to have a sair heart when I lose the sight of ye. De ye think they'll send ony body to fetch ye?"

"Oh, yes!" said Lotty, smiling.

"And did ye tell them to bring ye out widow's mourning? Here's yer husband been

buried these ten days, and ye wi' no crimped cap on yer head. In these outlandish pairts, they dinna ken what decency is; and though I hae gettin you a guid silk dress of a deep black, with yards o' crape, not in the hail town could I get yer widow's cap."

"But do you think my curls will go under a cap?"

"Bairn! bairn! dinna be flighty; we can cut the curls off, but ye maun be decent in yer weeds."

"Cut off those curls!" said Mr. Laird; "never, I would rather cut off my leg."

"Hoot, man! dinna spoil the bairn, when I am spending my breath in learning her, her duty. But, may be, ye hae sensible friends as will teach ye aright. Ye have nae mither; have ye an aunt now?"

"No," said Lotty.

"Nor a sister?"

"No."

"Nane but men folks?"

"Yes, I have some aunts-in-law and cousins-in-law."

"And wha dive ye think wull come for you? though I wish the day may be far off yet."

"Perhaps a brother will come, or, perhaps, two; or it may be one of my uncles, or, probably, a cousin."

"Och! set ye up, indeed; de ye think all the world is ready to gang clattering o'er foreign pairts, after a bit thing like you?"

"They love me very much."

"I'm thinking they could na help it," said Mr. Laird.

"Now, Alick, dinna fleech her up any mair, or, may be, she will be getting o'er full o' hersel, spite of a' my counsels. But save us! what's at the door?"

Lotty ran to the window, as the noise of a carriage was heard rattling up the street; one look, and she bounded out of the room, down the stairs, out of the door, and when Mrs. Laird looked out after her, she saw her in the arms and embraces of so many people, she lost sight of her "bairn" altogether.

Outstripping the post by two days, rivalling the wind in their intense desire to get on, the

loving Beauvillians had come for "their girl."

Mrs. Laird stood in the middle of the best parlour floor.

"My dear uncle Tom! Mrs. Laird," said the sweet thrilling voice, putting the large Beauvillian hand of fine, tall, bluff-looking uncle Tom, into hers. Uncle Tom nearly shook it off.

"And kind uncle Ned," bringing forward a larger, taller, more radiant, uncle Ned, who nearly wrung off the other hand.

"And my two brothers, Norman and Walter, and cousin Frank; dear, dear cousin Frank! how is my Pro.?"

And Lotty ran from one to the other, and each one took her up in his great arms, and would have gone on kissing her, if another had not been impatient to have her; and then, at intermediate times, each and all shook hands over and over again, with the amazed and astounded Mr. and Mrs. Laird. And then they all shook hands with each other, as if in such a state of congratulation and delight, that it was not to be expressed in any other form.

"We shall never forget your kindness," said uncle Tom.

"Your kindness to our girl, our dearest treasure," said uncle Ned, taking up the measure.

"You demand our everlasting gratitude," exclaimed Walter, going on.

"I am your servant for life," continued Norman.

"Really you must excuse me, I am so overpowered; will you oblige me by shaking hands again?" wound up Mr. Frank.

So they all start afresh, and then calming down again, they take the chairs offered mechanically by the bewildered hostess, and then they look at, scrutinize, with fond loving eyes, the change in "their girl."

"Did she look well?"

"Yes, they thought she did, they all agreed she did not look ill." So they all thanked and shook hands again with the Lairds.

"Did she look sorrowful?"

No; shocking as it is to allow it of our

perfect Lotty (though perfect people are very disagreeable), she did not look sorrowful.

On the contrary, her heart seemed to bloom and expand, under the cheering, happy influence of her own people; Mrs. Laird began to think there must be a dozen Lotties in the room, so bright, so fairy-like, did she seem, as she went from one to the other.

And amazing was it to the good couple to see how first, one great, fine, tall old gentleman, would rise from his chair, and walk across the room, apparently only to lay the large hand on the curly head, perhaps, lift up the pretty face and kiss it, and then go back to his chair; while another rose up and did the very same. Until at last, with abrupt, irrepressible truth, Mrs. Laird's wonder burst out into words:

"Lord save us! how ye do love that bairn!"

"We do love her," said one and all; "she is worthy of our love; she is our girl, our pride, our treasure—we dote on her."

Then was Lotty kissed again by all; and

the Lairds' hands were again seized and shaken vehemently.

No word was said of past events, no question asked of how and why. It was enough to the Beauvillians, that they had their girl once more their own; it was enough to Lotty, that she had five pair of strong, brawny arms, not to be matched in England, that only opened to present her with a home.

"Nae wonder," as Mrs Laird whispered to her faithful spouse, "that the bairn was unco queer in her ways."

But when the good Beauvillians had departed for the night to their hotel, most reluctant to leave, but most determined in their purpose not to teaze the good Lairds with their board and lodging, she made Lotty sit on her knee, and looking into her sunny eyes, said—

"Bairn, what are ye made on! that they great men-folk love yer little finger like the breath of Heaven?"

"I do not know, Mrs. Laird; but they have always done so, and I love them."

"I dinna wonder at it. Else may be I wad preach ye a sermon this night, having such bonny, bright, griefless eyes, and yer husband no in his grave ten days."

"Dear Ma'am, Philip would marry me, and would not wait for me to love my people less, and him more; and that made us unhappy, because, Ma'am, ah! because—they are so good, so true, so kind—"

"Ech! sirs, they're past everything, dinna ye gang now to be fleeched up; ayes me, but what am I saying, fleeched up, indeed, blessings on the bairn! I'm thinking yer just a bit angel slipt away from Heaven, and given to them fine, heartsome folk, as a present for their kindly natures. But me, how they shak honds; save us! I'll never recover it. But I see it all the noo. Nae wonder wi' such folk ye could na love dark, gloomy Philip Leigh, wi' a' his grand luiks. My word, when you and they were allthegither in my best parlour, I thought the gracious sun had ay come in at the winder and lighted us all up. Ech! lassie, the sight o' such folk does ane gude,

and the doctor's maist demented wi' gladness and pride. Little did we twa think, as we said ye suld hae our blue room, what a treat was in store for us. Whiles I feel out o' myself, and whiles I feel just like a drunken body; but, oh, bairn! we mauna forget the puir lad in his cauld grave."

* * * * *

That the loving Beauvillians had for some time fancied their little Lotty's marriage was concluded with rather more haste than prudence, could not be denied.

In the first place, unlike themselves, Philip was never glad to see them, never asked them to stay with him.

In the second place, he never came to see them, or brought their and his Lotty to show with pride and pleasure to all her doting relatives.

In the third place, he had carried off this treasure so beloved without warning, without leave. Certainly, they had no right to expect he would consult them; but it had grated sore

in their loving hearts that such an important matter should be done, settled, executed, and not one of them consulted, not one allowed to bid her farewell, not even her faithful nurse suffered to accompany her.

It required all the milk of human kindness so overflowing in the Beauvillian hearts, to prevent them from thinking of Philip Leigh in a way that was quite uncomfortable to their jovial natures. And nothing but her constant and happy letters prevented the milk from turning sour, and overwhelming Philip Leigh with the curds. Not that they had wholly left their darling Lotty to the care of one, about whom they were quite unhappy, not to think as highly of as they did of the rest of the world. For, unknown to her or Philip, a faithful Beauvillian had travelled after them, and contenting himself with seeing that she looked well and happy, had returned again with the news to his anxious brethren.

It was contrary to their open, frank natures, to ask any questions, or to appear to pry into things that were not brought under their im-

mediate eyes, so that they felt but little more than a vague notion, their Lotty had better be under the care of the smallest, most insignificant Beauvillian, than wedded to the handsome, distinguished-looking Philip Leigh.

Now they were so happy to have her once more their own, it was enough for them.

Philip might have been unkind, morose, dull, (dear Beauvillians! they could think of no greater sins)—but he was dead. The grave was sacred to them, and whatever feeling they might have had, was only expressed by the perversity with which they one and all seemed to think she was still Miss Beauvilliers. And when convicted of their mistake by the servants saying no such person had any boxes there, no one was in the house of that name; they only said in excuse, "Ah! we mean Lotty."

While making preparations for her return home, which was to be immediate, both on account of their anxiety to restore her once to her people, and because of some little domestic event about to happen in Mr.

Frank's family—Lotty heard all the news of everybody.

"My dearest Georgina insisted upon my coming, though I felt that even you, dear Lotty, would have forgiven me, had I so far restrained my impatient feelings on account of my dearest Georgina's interesting situation. But when we received your letter, when we felt that you must be brought home, brought home properly; though at first, there were far too many of us who had settled to come, my dearest Georgina said, 'You must be one of those chosen, you must go to our darling Lotty; for if you don't, you shall not have the girl you wish for—I will have twin-boys.' Think of my dear Georgina saying that! she did, indeed; and I thanked her from my heart. And whether she gives me a girl or not, I shall be grateful to my dearest Georgina all my life, for permitting me to be one of the favoured, happy few, to escort you home, dear Lotty."

The Beauvillians created quite a sensation in Homberg. They visited Lotty's old lodg-

ings, and left substantial marks of their having been there, to the inhabitants thereof. They went to see the good old Bonne, and besides giving her such a donation that she had never before beheld so much money at one time, they emptied a shop of its bon-bons, and distributed them among the children under her charge, who had contributed, though in so small a degree, to their Lotty's happiness. But they thereby endangered their lives for weeks to come, except that children's stomachs, and foreign children's in particular, are, through some wise provision, made to contain an incredible amount of sugar-plums.

As for the good Lairds, it seemed to them that some genial spirit had taken entire and full possession of their house, while the beaming presence of the fine fellows remained there. And the gratitude they expressed! Besides perpetual shaking of hands (indeed, if he had only been encouraged, Mr. Frank looked as if he could gladly salute the chaste but withered cheek of Mrs. Laird), the whole set of Beauvillians, in full conclave, presented Mr. and

Mrs. Laird with a very handsome present in money, to indemnify them for all the trouble and anxiety they must have had with their Lotty.

Not that they believed she was a trouble or anxiety, or that Mr. and Mrs. Laird were so foolish as to think they did do so; but it was just their way, to remove any idea of gratitude.

And as if that was not enough, each Beauvillian, in secret and privately, presented Mrs. Laird with a present of their own, just as if that one, individually, was more indebted to her kindness than all the others.

And when she would have expostulated as she received the third secret present, and openly said, how she had received two besides, she was not even listened to.

"Of course, of course — very right! I knew my kinsmen would not forget such a duty; and you must be kind enough to keep our presents as a remembrance of us."

As if she was ever likely to forget them. And so all things being ready, after a leave-

taking that was enough to shake the nerves of the winged Nineveh bull, if it had any, Mrs. Laird found herself sitting in the middle of her parlour floor, drowned in tears, and Mr. Laird endangering his limbs and his life, by stretching so far out of the window to take a last look, wave a last adieu.

But they had not departed without leaving a token of respect, at least, to the memory of the mistaken, self-sacrificed Philip Leigh.

Lotty's last act was to put a packet into Mrs. Laird's hand, saying: "You will see a proper monument put up, and everything done, just as if he were your 'bairn.'"

CHAPTER II.

Loving and lovely Margaret, with your shadowy form, your ethereal face, your gentle, calm submission, your pure faith, your pious patience, let us return to you.

Basil had found the sea strewn with light floating articles belonging to the "Marguerite," too surely indicating her fate, and selecting from these one or two well-known articles, had placed them, as we have seen, in that abrupt manner before Lady Katherine.

There might seem a degree of cruelty in this act, especially as Margaret, all unknowing to him, had witnessed the scene. But they had rightly judged her character; pity and sorrow for the poor mother made her lock up

in her innermost heart the grief and loneliness she was to carry to her grave. She felt that they had meant to shock the mother's feelings, for a peculiar purpose, and divined the cause.

No murmur escaped her lips, no duty was left undone. True to her unselfish nature, she urged Gerald with fervour to remove Millicent at once to a warmer climate. Her delicate frame seemed to suffer for those she loved, even more apparently than the mourners themselves. Yet, notwithstanding all this, they saw Margaret growing thinner and paler every day, presenting the appearance of a living, moving body, but the soul was far away. To Basil it seemed as if in her eyes there always dwelt the scene of the heaving, restless sea, bearing within its bosom that beloved form.

"She will die, if we cannot do something to change her thoughts and feelings. If Lotty were but here now!"

"It is strange," said Millicent, "she has never mentioned Lotty. I do not like to do so; in fact, I dare scarcely speak; it seems to me that but a cobweb thread holds her life and reason."

"Yes, her sensitive nature suffers when all is calm; unlike the violent outpourings of poor Lady Katherine, that fortunately weaken themselves by their very vehemence."

"I am glad Mr. Grey is to live in the house with Lady Katherine, she seems to have taken so great a fancy to him."

"Yes, Milly; so now you and Gerald may leave with comfort; and the sooner you go, remember, the more you please Margaret. I should, like when I see her to-day, to say you are gone."

"Do so, Basil; for it was but the pain of leave-taking that has made us linger. We are all ready, and only last night agreed it would be best to depart in secrecy."

"Much better. None of our nerves at present can stand much more strain on them. I will spend an hour or two with Margaret, and will then follow you to Liverpool. She will be interested to hear the last news of you."

It was thus they cared for, and thought of, their poor, stricken Margaret.

When Basil joined them at Liverpool, he told Millicent that Margaret seemed relieved by knowing they were gone, and, taking advantage of the moment, he had spoken to her of Lotty.

A slight flush rose on the white cheek, the eyes lost that ever-searching, mournful look, but all she said was—"My Lotty will come to me when she can."

"Thus, Milly, we can hope for no particular change just yet. When the little, bright, cheerful spirit joins her Margaret, we may expect some good, for she always seemed to divine what her school-wife most loved."

"You will write to Lotty, Basil?"

"I hardly think so; she has enough to bear without. Now, Milly, farewell; I need scarcely say to you that you have no easy task before you, for Gerald bears within his breast a bruised and contrite heart."

"You are right, brother. Until he meets Harold face to face before the judgment-throne of God, he will never cease, while breath is given him, to implore mercy and pardon for

the share he thinks he has had in Harold's fate."

So Margaret's mother came to live with her, and the bleak December passed away, bringing in a stormy, violent January.

She had been to her nursery to watch her fine boy enjoy his dinner; she had looked into the cot that contained a rosy, sleeping babe, whose red lip was never to be pressed by a father's kiss; she had seen her steward, and transacted all her business with him; she had read to her mother the psalms and lessons of the day; and, with the same dreamy air and quiet, listless manner, she called for her bonnet and shawl, to take her daily walk.

"The sleet drives in great gusts," remonstrated the nurse; "you will take cold, my lady."

"I cannot take cold," answered her lady, mechanically.

"The gardener says there will be soon a heavy fall of snow, my lady."

"Does he?" answered Margaret, still as in a dream, while she put on her bonnet: "Do not take the children out, then."

And she went.

"One would suppose she never heeded what I was saying," murmured the nurse; "and yet she must have done so, to have remembered the children. The Lord touch her heart with life again, for it is sore to see her thus!"

Margaret went to Rose Leigh, her daily custom. Lady Katherine, as usual, received her as if they had not met for years, installed her in her own chair, and hovered about her as a loving hen guards the one nestling left her. Pru. was in an excited state to-day, and had a great deal to tell Margaret. In fact, ever since the departure of Mr. and Mrs. Herbert, and the arrival of Mr. Grey, Pru. had been growing more and more enigmatical in her conduct. And had Margaret ever heard the episode of the curate, absorbed as she was, she must have noticed Pru.'s manner.

"I have heard from dear Georgina," said Pru. "Frank has left her for a short time"

"Indeed," answered Margaret.

"Mr. Grey is so much liked among the people, my dear daughter," said Lady Katherine.

"Ah!" answered Margaret, unheeding Pru.'s violent blush.

"There are snow-drops appearing already, dear Margaret, cold as the weather is."

"Is it cold?" said Margaret.

"Mr. Grey said it was bitterly cold," continued Lady Katherine, "and he is the best judge of weather I know."

Again Pru. flushed and grew pale.

"Shall I walk back with you, dear Margaret?"

"If you please," was her quiet answer.

During this walk, which lasted much longer than from Rose Leigh to Court Leigh, Pru.'s excitement broke out into one incessant chatter in which a certain pronoun, he, was mixed up with everything on which she discoursed, and which, on less unheeding ears, would have divulged poor Pru.'s secret. Once only did Margaret show interest.

"It was Lotty's doing, all dear, darling Lotty's plan," said Pru.

"What plan?" asked Margaret.

"Why," answered Pru., blushing vehemently, at being asked a question she did not expect, "that he came."

"My Lotty came?" asked Margaret in perplexity.

"No, no, though I wish in my heart she was, then all would go right; but it snows hard now, dear Margaret, so I will run home, as you must go in."

Margaret did not go in, she liked the wild weather; it brought a pulse of life in her heart, to watch the wintry elements. They seemed typical of her own withered hopes.

"Lotty," she said to herself, unconsciously, "my Lotty! I wish she would come. It seems to me, her presence would prove to me like the first snow-drop of spring, seen in this wintry weather. Ah! Lotty, if you were here, perhaps you could devise some means by which I could visit that spot, behold with my own eyes, if the sea can give me up no message from her dead. If I could have something; even in the hour of utmost danger, he would have written to his Margaret, he would have sent me some last directions safely enclosed within some floating casket. I know, I feel sure there is such, and if Lotty were here—"

"She is here, Queen Margaret, these are her arms round you, her kisses pouring on you—but stay—say nothing, speak not to her, for there is your treasure, your message from the dead. Your Lotty would have been here before, but that she knew what her Margaret wanted. She went, she sought, she has found it. Take it, sweetest, dearest mourner! Basil was the real discoverer, your Lotty only the diviner; now, here, in the little summer-house, you will be alone, unwatched, unseen—God bless my Margaret!"

And Lotty, placing in Margaret's trembling hands an oilskin packet, directed to her, kissed her cheek with passionate fondness, and left her alone.

First Lotty went to the nursery, and kissing young Harold, took her little god-daughter to-be in her arms, and said, "This is my child, nurse."

"God be praised for it, Ma'am! and more than all, that you have come back. We have looked to no change in our dear Lady, until you could arrive."

"God has been very good in giving me the power to bring her a last token of remembrance from her husband."

"Heaven be praised! 'twas all she wanted." And the tears fell in showers from the good nurse's eyes.

Lotty now went across, spite of the driving snow, to Rose-Leigh. She peeped in at the window, and saw Lady Katherine with her feet and nose comfortably in the fire, that is, near the fire, knotting away with an indefatigable perseverance worthy a great cause. On the other side of the fire, equally comfortable, sat a gentleman; the sound of his strong, sonorous, voice came through the window; he was reading aloud. Rather behind her mother, sat Pru., who ought to have been knotting; "but oh!" as Lotty upbraided her afterwards, "her knotting was on the floor, and she was gazing, unabashed, on the face of a young man, not more than forty years of age."

Lotty went quietly into the room, but Pru. was not so absorbed in her occupation, as to forget old friends.

"Dearest, dear Lotty! you have returned to us at last;" and the knotting became inextricably entangled in the legs of two chairs, as Pru. sprung nimbly round them, to embrace her.

With touching, child-like feeling, Lady Katherine looked at the little girlish thing, and said,—"My dear, don't kiss me, do not be kind to me, for I am a very unworthy, wicked woman! I love to see your sweet face again, we have been longing for you, but I have widowed your Margaret; I, I have broken her heart. Oh! my son, my son, my only son!"

"But I will kiss my Margaret's mother thus and thus, and I love Harold's mother as if she were my own, and I bring her the greatest comfort she can now have, a last fond letter from her son, full of love and forgiveness, I know."

"Where?—oh, where?—let me see the blessed words!"

"Margaret has the letters, we must leave her alone with her treasure as yet."

"Oh, Lotty! how did you get them?" asked Pru.

"Basil has written to me constantly, all the news from here, and all he knew of that fatal night. He felt that some of these days, Margaret might like to know every particular; then I should be able to tell her, or to show her the letters. He has collected every paper, every account, every circumstance that occurred to our Harold from the time he left home, until that fatal Thursday night. From that time he has given me a history of his own voyage, when Gerald accompanied him. Again of a second one, when he discovered the fatal truth, and found those few sad remains; and among other things that he has collected, is the figure-head of the 'Marguerite.' The instant I knew this, I called to mind several things that I had heard poor Harold say of this figure-head. How he had had infinite pains taken with it, so that it should resemble Margaret in attitude and face. How he should consider it as his guardian angel, and that it might indeed prove so to him, for it was constructed in a peculiar manner. Fur-

ther, I remember in particular, he said,—'The image of my Margaret shall never be destroyed or wrecked. It shall float, though all the rest of the vessel is riven in pieces:' so on my road home, we appointed Basil to meet us at Cowes, and there, in the 'Ripple,' was laid all that remained of the ill-fated 'Marguerite.'

"Proceed, dear, dear Lotty, oh! finish your tale."

The heroic little Lotty was stifling her tears.

"The figure-head of the ship was so like my Margaret; her small, graceful head just turned and bent, as if in the act of listening; the slight hands touching, half laced together by the fingers, her own peculiar attitude, as you know. But Basil wondered why I examined it so minutely.

"'See, Basil,' I said, 'it has not been separated from the ship by violence, or blows. It has been carefully unscrewed and sent adrift.'

"'You are right, Lotty,' he answered, 'and these hollow tubes must have gone through the beams. The screws must have penetrated to the cabin, or been fastened from there.'

"'And unfastened again. Let us sound it, it is almost hollow within.'"

"Suffice it to say, we found a spring, which opened to us the hollow cavity, that, filled with air, caused the figure-head to float so buoyantly, when all heavier things were swallowed up, in those shifting sands. And within was also Harold's last message to Margaret. I have brought it and given it to her."

"Ah, Lotty! best Lotty, you are well-named, but my son can send nothing but upbraidings, to his mother. Nevertheless I will meekly receive them; if my poor, dear, widowed Margaret forgives me, and has fond messages to him from his watery grave, I shall be very grateful to a merciful God. It will be quite as much as I deserve."

"God afflicts none more than they are able to bear, dear Lady Katherine," said Mr. Grey.

"I feel that; nay, I know it. What ought I not to suffer? yet how am I blessed!"

"I am very glad to find Mr. Grey is living with you," said Lotty.

"Under God's blessing, he has saved my soul, dear Lotty! from very sinful murmurings and despair. I was almost lost in every way, for my Margaret was too good to me."

"He is very good and kind to us both," murmured Pru., blushing violently.

"I am very glad to hear he is kind to you," whispered Lotty back again.

With all her tender heart and melting sorrow, some things bewitched little Lotty into being mischievous.

"When shall I see my Margaret?" began Lady Katherine, with nervous tremor.

"We must not disturb her," answered Lotty; "when she is calm, she will join us. If she has comfort to bestow, so much the sooner will she come."

"How well you know her character," said Mr. Grey; "it seems strange that one so faultless should be thus tried."

"Pure gold is tried in the fire," answered Lotty.

"Lotty," said Lady Katherine, abruptly, "where is Philip?"

The little childish thing looked up with amazement for a moment—then she glanced at her black dress.

"I thought I heard he was ill, dead," continued Lady Katherine; "but I am grown so selfish, so absorbed, you must forgive me, dear child. You have no white cap on your head like my Margaret; your pretty curls are as usual; I trust he may be spared to you, poor, little, young thing!"

The colour deepened in Lotty's cheeks until they bloomed like winter roses. Then she said:

"I have come home to be once more Margaret's little school-husband, for we are both alone now; God has taken Philip Leigh to his rest."

In the little summer-house did the widowed Margaret read this letter, a message sent by the sea from her dead.

"Margaret! what is this I have to do? I have written to you before. Thank God! I wrote from Jersey; a letter—such a letter as

I ought to write to my Margaret. And now but a few days are passed since that was penned and sent; and in this scrawled, blotted, stained sheet of paper, you are to take my last message, the only letter you will evermore receive from the Harold you loved so well, the last token of his love for you.

"Oh, fate! fate! could you pour no other vial of wrath on my devoted head? Was the measure of my sins so great, that I was to bear for three days, (each a lifetime,) alternate hope and despair; gleams of strength and resignation; hours of horror and remorse; every feeling that can lacerate the human heart, yet bid it hope against hope; was I to bear all this with a man's weak spirit, only to learn that death is about to part me and thee, Margaret? One man on board—but one—announces that nothing can save us. But he is the only experienced sailor we have, and my reason bids me feel and know that his words are true. I see the drift of the undercurrent, ignorant sailor as I am. I watch the light articles tossed over, they all float one

way, to a doom that is inevitable. Let me collect my thoughts, let me strive to take leave of my Margaret as befits her husband. An irresistible impulse bids me write, all these three days it has urged me like the sharp prick of conscience. I obey; incoherent, hasty, desponding and despairing as my words may be, I write to Margaret, my wife, my fond, loving wife! Oh, God! wilt thou not hear my prayer? Let me see her again, for her own sweet sake, not mine. One word, one look, 'tis all I ask. A slight preparation! she can have none, it is impossible; naked, plain, in all its stern truth, the fact will be told her, as in a breath, 'Your Harold is dead, drowned—drowned in the very vessel he made your rival!' How she will feel for me! how she will gasp and say, 'In any other way, oh, God! I could have borne it better; but not from his own wilfulness, not his own headstrong will.'

"But, Margaret, I can comfort you there. 'Tis true, my mother's letter drove me away. I expected an answer from you to that I wrote

from Jersey—(I love to think upon that letter, it was a fitting one for you)—and I received hers; only that one from my mother, and a message from you in it. A newspaper, too, with that lie! those lies! Did you believe them? Oh, no! no! mad, fierce, wild as was my passion, in the midst of all it drove me to do, one small voice would repeat, 'Margaret loves you! Margaret trusts you! why care for others?'

"But I must needs get away into the wide, open sea, out of sight of land; that land, which held so true and fond a wife and mother! So I gave the order, and when we were many hours away, I went on deck to breathe and think. The wind blew in fitful gusts—it cooled my brain. Suddenly, a sweeping, soft air came rushing by, as if stirred by angels' wings, and a voice seemed to speak to my heart—

"'Remember Margaret's state. Bethink you of her tender, sensitive nature. The word that attainted her Harold's name would be as a sword entering her heart.'

"And so, Margaret, as if the touch of the Saviour had driven the demon from his hold, and the holy words had dismissed and rebuked him, did I become calm and in my right mind. I gave the order to return at once, and went down to my cabin and thanked God. I then saw it all. My mother so angry; my Margaret so hurt with her; perhaps she had, all unfit as she was, travelled to Cowes, to meet and console, and love more fondly than ever, her wayward, but not wicked, Harold—her traduced, foully-slandered Harold. But a fear crept in silently, fixedly, the shock might have been too much. My Margaret is so very tender, so sensitive for her Harold. Perhaps she had gone already to Heaven, taking with her a little, blighted blossom. Perhaps those two stars were her seraph eyes, beaming down on me, and bidding me prepare. Those stars I saw but three nights ago. If so, Death, I welcome thee, hideous as thou hast presented thyself. I am calmer. I was going to comfort you, perhaps there is no need for me to do so; but my

mother—poor mother! she meant nothing, I know. If I had reached home within an hour after sending that letter, I should still have been her dear son. So I wish it known to all, that not on me rests the sin of hurrying all these unprepared souls to their last account.

"I said I gave the order for the ship to return, and went down to my cabin. My company were not congenial to my present thoughts, and I remained for many hours; until I thought we might see lights on the island.

"All was wild, dark, stormy; a desert of sea and waves.

"'When shall we reach Cowes?' I asked of the helmsman.

"'Cowes! we had a second order from you, through one of the young ladies, to keep our course for Holland.'

"So, Margaret, they did it. Let them weep and wail. Let them upbraid and weary Heaven with their cries; on their own shoulders rests their doom.

"They thought I was actuated by whim,

in going out to sea; they had a whim not to return. Thus are we lost through folly.

"And Mr. Clare; to him we owe it, that we have so poor a crew, a captain utterly weak and incapable, ignorant even to my own extent of nautical matters. But one man on board knows these fatal sands: a greater man than I am once escaped them. Why should not we? I must hope. God never gave me such a gift as Margaret—to tear me from her thus. And yet I valued her not. Oh, God! if I see her once again—if I hold her once more in these arms, second to Thee only shall she be! She will teach me to worship and praise Thee. Poor Gerald! Tell him the promise has come true—'He has cast his bread upon the waters, it will not return to him void.' I remember scoffing at his text—'Make Thou Thy servant to delight in that which is good.' But useless for me is that prayer now, though it haunts me. But a few hours more, the old seaman says— The ship drives heavily. Margaret, I would not that you should think these blurred, unsteady lines

are other than accidental. Your Harold is calm. Hope may be departing, but God is at the helm. I think again of Gerald, and say, 'Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before Thee, and am no more worthy to be called Thy son;' but forgive me! oh, forgive me!

"Thus do I pray, at every moment that I do not pray for thee.

"I have been on deck. In a vain hope to aid us, for want of coal, we have burnt every available thing within the ship. Doors, partitions, all are gone. We group together, for we cannot separate. None can go hide their grief and despair; nakedly shown before us all, are the different phases of woe in all their human weakness.

"My companions gaze on me, preparing these papers—my will—for you, fond wife. They derive comfort from my calmness, thinking the wild scene above is but a hideous drama, in which they take no part. Poor Miss Clare! Poor Augusta!—she beseeches me to save her; and calls upon you, my Mar-

garet, to hear her vows and promises. Never more will she give you one moment's uneasiness—never more will she see or speak to me again. I believe her there; but I smile in pity at her words. My Margaret knew all her Harold's sins and weaknesses; I thank God I have nothing to confess. She upbraids me as the cause of their impending doom: again I thank God, and so must you, Margaret: not only is my soul free (for even her companions chide her for her words) from this charge, but He who sees into all hearts knows I would freely give my life for hers, so unfit is she to die, while I rest in the hope of the thief on the cross.

"My boy! Make him the Harold I ought to have been. With his mother near him, I know his father's name will be green in his memory evermore.

"If God has given you a fatherless child, Margaret, take it into your innermost heart, as your Harold's last gift.

"You have much to do, fond, loving wife—loving, idolized, adored Margaret—my estates

to redeem, my people to reform, my name to clear, until it is second to none in honour and truth. Margaret will do this ere I see her again. God help and support me! These people moan, and shriek, and cry, but who among them has to leave a Margaret?

"Again I have staggered on deck. A little sloop rides on every crested wave two miles astern. I fear for her; but the old mate says she can float in safety where we cannot go. I feel strangely interested in her; she is the last earthly thing on which my eyes will rest: she will most probably witness our fate. Evening closes, but we will burn blue lights. Haply, when she sees them suddenly extinguished, and hears the wild cry of drowning agony, some pious heart on board will say, 'God have mercy on their souls!'

"I told you, in my letter from Jersey, of a young girl who was of our company, a cousin of Miss Clare's, a little, delicate, fair thing. On our first danger she grew pale and white; but during this lifetime of alternate hope and despondency (which has made your Harold's

hair turn thus, Margaret—see, I have cut off your favourite lock—by the white hairs so suddenly strewn in it, think, wife, how your Harold mourns for you, bereft and lonely)—during this time, I say, that young girl has uttered no cry, has made no moan. She followed me everywhere with her large, sad eyes and wistful face; and, as if in answer to my questioning look, whether I could do aught for her, said: 'Pray, let me stay near you; it does me good, and strengthens me to see you.'

"For very sad, my Margaret, is it to see the others: those who ought to be their nearest and dearest comforters, have blindly drowned their sense of danger in wine. 'Tis a pitiable sight. I know you will be glad to think I had a little, gentle spirit near me, to whom I could do some good. I have written, at her dictation, a letter to her sister, the only near relation she has in the world, and whom she disobeyed, coming on this ill-fated voyage—that is, she came against her sister's wishes, who is much older than herself, and who does not

love the Clares. The innocent child thinks her dreadful death a proper judgment on her. She says her sister is poor, and was made still more so, by her efforts to afford every pleasure and good she was able to this little sister.

"'Now,' she says, 'she will be free from me, and need go out to teach no more; but she will sadly mourn and weep for me, and who will comfort her?'

"'My Margaret will,' I answered.

"'Then I have no other care,' she said. 'If I may hold your hand, as we go down, I will neither shriek nor cry, sir, or struggle. God will be good to me, and take my soul at the first rush of the water!'

"So, now the hour comes. A shock sends a trembling thrill, as if of life, through every timber of the 'Marguerite.' Loud and shrill rise those shrieks of agony and despair! Poor Augusta! unhappy creature! she knows not what she says so wildly. Her sister-in-law falls fainting back: that young, quiet child kneels by my side and prays!

"Comfort my poor mother.

"And now to put up this packet. Margaret, my fond, sweet, loving Margaret! your Lotty will bring you these words—your best Lotty. I something remember telling her my plan that the guardian angel of my ship should float, did all else perish. She knows you will not live without your Harold's adieu. So, take it—take my last fond blessing, and, with it, the knowledge that, however dreadful my fate, however hard my doom, yet can I bear it all; for, through the mercy of my God and Saviour, I hope to meet my wife in Heaven!"

* * * * *

None may lift the veil that shrouds such mourners, for the weak language of man is unfitted to describe their grief.

It was the fourteenth of February. Lotty had met Basil in the cedar walk, to give him the daily account of Margaret.

"Will she ever recover, Lotty?" asked he, mournfully.

"Yes; Harold bid her live; she will do it."

"It is your birth-day, Lotty," said he.

"Yes. I wish I was dead!"

"Nay, best Lotty, what could we do without you? Margaret would have died but for you."

"Have you settled all about that old Miss Clare?"

"Yes; she is now at the Rectory, and seems well-fitted to take charge of it until my sister comes home."

"And how does she seem?"

"Why, Lotty, she appears to have been very fond of that little sister, and—"

"Refuses to be comforted, of course; mourns like us all."

"But she is a good woman, Lotty; and says she will make no unworthy moan, for God has comforted her only the shock was great."

"I suppose I must go and see her."

"Yes, Lotty, and read the little sister's letter; but not to-day, for you have a birthday sad enough already."

"I wish to have no more, this world is too sorrowful and bad to live in."

"Do not quit it yet awhile, Lotty, we have

much for you to do; besides, Bear would die of grief—to say nothing of others."

"I'll bequeath Bear to you, but now I must return to Margaret."

"First tell me, Lotty, does she take an interest in anything?"

"Yes, she reads Harold's letter all day, and looks at and touches that half black, half white, curl."

"Does she speak to you, Lotty?"

"Yes, she says drowning cries pierce her ears, and she sees stormy waves and drowning people, when she shuts her eyes."

"Ah, don't, Lotty, you harrow my very heart-strings."

"Then don't ask foolish questions."

"Nay, just a few more. Does she see her children?"

"Yes, she weeps over them, until I have to send them away."

"Does she think of you, Lotty, and love you as ever?"

"Yes, when she reads Harold's letter."

"Does she talk much of him, and mention his name?"

"She speaks of nothing else, and says no other name."

"How long is this to last, Lotty?"

"Just as long as she chooses, so good bye."

The next day Lotty came springing to meet Basil, with a step that shewed her heart was lighter.

"Do you know, Basil, she remembered it was my birth-day, and thought it so sad I should be but eighteen, yet a widow;—as if she were much older. And she called to mind of her own accord, how my father used to send the cart into Bath, laden with good things, and presents for the whole school, on my birth-day, and she smiled, it was her first smile, but so sad, so wan—"

"Do not weep, Lotty, sweetest Lotty! you see you are to be her best earthly comforter yet."

"And, Basil, she asked about Miss Rachael Clare, and said, you always fixed upon the right thing for everybody."

"And what more said she?"

"Why, she said, that is, she feared she had been very selfish—"

"As how, Lotty?"

"About me?"

"I do not understand, pray explain."

"I have nothing to explain, Basil; only she seemed to remember I ought to be in grief, or I was in grief, and that she ought to comfort me, and all that."

Basil tried to catch a glimpse of Lotty's face, but failed.

"You know, Lotty, you did wrong to marry."

"No one suffered but myself."

"Dearest Lotty! who could have had the heart to give you pain?"

"I only pained myself."

"But poor Philip's greatest fault—"

"Was loving me too much," interrupted Lotty, quickly.

"I do not wonder at it," exclaimed Basil, abruptly. Then recovering himself, he raised her hand to his lips, with the air of a courtier

saluting his rightful queen, saying, low and soft, "True, loyal wife."

Lotty received the truth and the compliment with a very sedate air, as if it were nothing to her what Basil thought or said.

"Now when do you intend to go to your own home?" she asked.

"Are you tired of me?" he answered.

"Not at all; only as time alone can now help Margaret, it is useless your moping about here, when, perhaps, you are much wanted at home. I feel sure Hugh and Brian wish we all had been drowned together; and so do I, for the matter of that."

"If you think I can be of no further good, I will gladly return home; for though my boys have no such base thoughts as you mention, especially as regards yourself, they really do require me."

"Then, good bye."

"Nay, be not so impatient to be rid of me—you will write to me?"

"Yes, once a week."

"Then I shall come down between each letter, to enquire after you all."

"I will write twice a week, then."

"I presume I must be content with that; and if you want me—"

"I'll telegraph, or send Bear."

"Very good; you will write the first letter to-morrow?"

"No, the day after."

"You will think of me, Lotty, far away from you all?"

"Yes, as very happy with your brothers."

"As very unhappy, until I see you again."

"Time will mend that, as you must not come for six months."

"Luckily I shall be wanted in less than three. I am little Harold's guardian."

"Then I will amuse myself by spoiling him, to give you some trouble."

"Good bye, Lotty! do what you please, I am of Brian and Hugh's opinion, you cannot do wrong."

"Good bye, Basil; Heaven send you better

judgment. Shake hands, Bear, like a gentleman, for Basil is going away."

The day after Basil reached home, he received a letter from Lotty, as follows :

"I am obliged to write to you, Basil, because Margaret wishes it; she says she would like to have seen you before you went, but I know better, so do not grieve about that. A little more strain on her nerves, and they would break, and you are so foolishly tender-hearted, you would never bear up as I do.

"I am also to tell you, she wants her image, that guardian angel of the 'Marguerite,' you know. We left it in the 'Ripple,' like apes, as we were; we might have known she would wish to have it, without troubling her to ask for it. Also, you are to find out if ever the drowned are washed up off those sands; and further, every particular about the storm—how many vessels were lost, and how many souls went down. And please to collect all that the newspapers said. You know we have carefully kept the sight of them from her, and

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she bids me ask you to keep them all,—for the time may come when she will take a melancholy pleasure in looking at them ; and for the sake of the children, no incident relative to their father ought to be lost. But pray answer this letter to her : it is better for us both. She can read your letter to herself, and as for me, my heart is not stone. The Beauvillians are good lovers, but indifferent mourners : they know not how to be unhappy. If they lose a friend or brother by death, they say, ' He was good and worthy ; he has gone home, where we shall soon follow.' If misfortunes come upon one, the others flock round and say, ' Here, brother, take of ours ; we have enough, and to spare.' If sickness and pain afflict any, ' Ha !' say they, ' in the next world we shall suffer nothing.'

" You must know, Basil, she has smiled again. It was at a letter from my cousin, Frank. I would send it to you, but really his paternal felicities are not fit to be seen by any but very friendly eyes. The newspapers will tell you of his happiness. I am going to

see Miss Rachel. The name of Clare gives me the shivers. Young Harold cried for something this morning ; mindful of your responsibilities, I gave it to him,—Bear's love. This letter is written by a disconsolate being, called

"Lotty."

Though Basil is not to see Mr. Frank's letter, the reader shall have a peep at it for old acquaintance sake.

"My dearest Lotty,

"My beloved Georgina, with the fortitude only possessed by her sex, has made me the most delighted of men as well as the happiest father. You remember how kindly she insisted upon my coming for you, and threatened me with a certain punishment if I did not accede to her wishes; and now my darling Georgina has fulfilled her promise, made so sweetly to me, even better than she said she would, for at half-past three on Sunday morning, (just before the propitious 14th of February,) she made me the happy father of the sweetest little girl you ever saw, and

within half an hour she presented me with another equally charming.

"You will allow, dear Lotty, that my feelings naturally would be very much overcome, and will therefore excuse a longer letter, and that I mix nothing of sorrow and sympathy in one announcing such an auspicious event.

"I will only further say, the beloved mother and sweet babes are doing charmingly, and just now my dearest Georgina whispered to me, one little daughter should be called Lotty, and I said in answer, the other should be Georgina, for we had had our little dispute about the name; most fortunately settled by the amiable and never-to-be-sufficiently-praised conduct of my dearest wife in presenting me with two lovely girls.

"Your most happy, overcome kinsman,

"Frank Beauvilliers."

"Poor, dear Pro.!" sweet Margaret had said.

"The Beauvillians will be rampant," answered Lotty.

CHAPTER III.

There was something remarkably pleasing about Mr. Grey: without being handsome, there was a mixture of intellect, sense, and good humour in his countenance, that attracted attention, and warmed the heart towards him. His manner was uniformly lively and cheerful, yet never obtrusive; in fact, he had the gift of always appearing at the right moment, and always saying the most appropriate word.

Long ago, in younger days, when his kind heart was enthusiastic as well as kind, he had felt a warm interest in the poor Miss Leighs. Like little, uncomplaining doves in a cage, they cooed through their dull, monotonous lives in as unobtrusive a manner as they could;

hemmed in by forms and ceremonies, they hardly knew that there was any other existence by which the many little tendernesses of their hearts could be occupied. Yet Mr. Grey had in the short period of their acquaintance discovered that both were well furnished with gentle, kind natures, only waiting to bud forth on fitting reason, and wanting nothing but opportunity to blossom into full fragrance.

Miss Leigh, in particular, appeared to him so peculiarly fitted to render a sensible and affectionate man happy, that he had begun to question himself as to the propriety of seeking her society further, without any reasonable hope of gaining his wishes, when Lady Katherine put a sudden and peremptory finale to whatever incipient hopes had begun to bud. The blow was more heavy than Mr. Grey imagined; and bidding adieu to love, he turned his quiet energies into other channels.

As curate of a large and populous parish, he had but little time to think of Miss Leigh and do his duty. As rector of a small living,

he undertook to educate a number of half-brothers and sisters, and tied himself and his fortune down, for the benefit of their mother and them.

The greatest excitement and indulgence that he ever allowed himself was the study of geology, mineralogy, and botany; in all of which sciences he gained a proficiency, envied by half the professors in each branch, running so rife through the scientific world.

When he received Mr. Herbert's offer, through the instrumentality of Mrs. Leigh, and found himself again in such immediate contact with the first object of his affections, he naturally concluded that the love of stones, flowers, and strata, which had held him in such unbounded thrall for ten years, was much superior to the half pity, half love, he had for three short months felt for Miss Leigh; so sure was he of this, that arriving in the very moment of their heavy calamity, he had, at Mr. Herbert's request, fearlessly taken up his abode with Lady Katherine and the gentle Pru.

We have seen that the latter, having had

no rival, save Lotty, and nothing to divert her thoughts, was still faithful; and, indeed, she was not far wrong in thinking that the ten years had only passed over Mr. Grey's head to improve him. He bore within him a contented, cheerful heart, a well-disciplined, active mind, moderate and easily pleased desires, with a strong pervading principle of religion, that never slumbered or waxed faint: with such a man time had no dealings, years passed over him as lightly as days on the indolent and unthankful.

Pru. was not so fortunate; good, sweet, and amiable as she was, some little secret corner of repining had touched her cheek with a few wrinkles, had somewhat angularised her form, and imparted a slight tendency to redness in her nose. But whatever she might have lost in beauty, Mr. Grey soon began to discover she had gained in amiability.

Mineralogy, botany, and geology, were certainly bewitching sciences. In their services he had almost forgotten the existence of Miss Leigh; but when they came to be placed in

actual contact with her feminine virtues, and he had to compare the delights of discovering a new flower, with her gentle endurance of her mother's whims, or a curious fossil, while she, with gentle eyes, told him of some new patient requiring his tender, christian care: then we are bound to confess Pru. rose high in the scale of his regard, while mineralogy, botany, and geology, kicked the beam together. He came at a most fortunate moment for Lady Katherine, who was only saved from insanity by hardly having sufficient sense to realise the horror of her work.

But she was in that state that made her cling to any one who would relieve her from the dead weight of sorrow and remorse, feelings she could hardly comprehend, yet which would make themselves felt. It was with the heart and spirit of a little, humble child that she threw herself into the pious hands of the kind, mercy-loving John Grey.

So soothing were his efforts, so gentle his persuasive words, so pure his faith and piety, that under his care she grew calm, yet not for-

getful, happy, though always repentant; apparently much like the Lady Katherine of old, yet essentially different.

Meanwhile months went on, May was beginning to deck the earth with her flowers, and render it fragrant by their sweet odours.

"Lotty, love, I am told you are repairing and painting High Leigh. Do my mother and I tie your sweet spirit down too much with our dulness?" Thus spoke Margaret on that May morning.

"I should be dull away from you, and that you may believe. No, Bear and I are doing up High Leigh for some friends of ours to live in; they were very kind to us when we were lonely and sad in foreign lands, and though we do not wish you to be ill, yet we hope that you will catch a little cold now and then, or the children have measles, that you may employ the valuable services of Mr. Laird."

"Are those nice kind people really coming, Lotty?"

"Yes, Queen Meg, I am going to let them have High Leigh, because Mrs. Laird was so

fond of poor Philip, and will like to live in his house, and we ought to have a medical man nearer to us than Dr. Murray, and he is glad of help besides; so altogether we think it a fine arrangement."

"An arrangement very like you, my Lotty."

"Bear and I, if you please. We settled it a month ago, because, in the first place, we like living with you, and Lady Montagu, and secondly, High Leigh does not agree with Bear's health. He suffers from neuralgia there, and nervous affections; is it not so, old fellow?"

Bear whisked his great tail by way of assent, whereby a hideous, but most valuable piece of old Dragon china went smash on the floor, swept off by that ever-active member. Lotty scolded, and Bear looked meek and penitent, so was kissed and forgiven.

"Bear and I have also another scheme in our heads, only we cannot do it without your help."

"Command it, best Lotty."

"We wish to make a matrimonial contract between John Grey and Charlotte Leigh."

"Lotty, love! what strange thing will not you and Bear do next?"

"Not at all strange, sweet Meg. They knew each other long ago, they loved each other then. Watch the gentle Pru., and you will see she is more than 'full fathom five in love,' now. But Mr. Grey is too conscientious; you must lend us your help, otherwise he will leave on a sudden, knowing Lady Katherine's former wishes. He will fear that she is biassed now, by her liking for him; and though Bear and I think in his heart he loves sweet Pru. dearly, yet will he hold the secret closely shut within it, unless you interfere."

"I will gladly do so; I should like my dear mother to have so kind a son; we must not lose him, from such motives—but I am so selfish, Lotty, I see none of these things—"

"When you are selfish, then believe that Bear and I hate each other with a biting, acrimonious hatred, not to be matched."

"When I am rich enough I wish to build a little church, Lotty."

"Yes, a memorial church in the Upper

Park, half-way to High Leigh, and Mr. Grey shall be curate of it, when Gerald comes home."

"Ah! Lotty, you see into people's hearts, you know every thing."

"Yes truly; among others, that your mother wishes you to go from home."

"She wishes, Lotty, for us all to go to the sea-side."

"Then we go."

"I suppose so," answered Margaret, sighing; "for myself, I want but one change."

This was said so low, Lotty might well be excused pretending not to hear it.

"Here is Pru., crossing the lawn. Now, Margaret, watch and see if my little love-tale is not true. Dear Pru.," continued Lotty, "in what manner have you been uncivil to Mr. Grey, that he is going to leave you?"

"Leave us! going!" cried the poor unsuspecting Pru., with most innocent dismay; "oh dear! oh dear! how unhappy I am!" and sinking into a chair, she burst into tears.

"Only this evening, dear, to dine with us," said the naughty Lotty; "but as you seem to

take even that short separation to heart, perhaps Margaret will ask you also."

"Oh! dear Lotty, I did not think you could be so unkind," sobbed Pru.

"Dear Charlotte," said sweet Margaret, "I like your Mr. Grey very much, and you need not be ashamed to love so good a man. Some of these days I shall hope to see you his good and gentle wife."

"I think Lotty is really very, very unkind," answered Pru, for once in her life feeling hot and angry. She had reason to be nettled at the unkind means Lotty had taken to surprise her secret."

"Margaret would not believe me, dear, she said you did not care one bit for him," pleaded the mischievous penitent.

"Oh! but, dear Margaret, he is so good, so kind, that is, Mamma thinks, and I always knew, I mean of course, dear Margaret, it is not as that unkind Lotty says, because, you know, he never says anything; and I dare say never will, because it is not to be expected that—"

"Margaret can make any sense out of al that you are saying. Kiss me, and forgive me, like a good Pru., and I will never be naughty again."

"You know I must kiss and forgive you, but still you were very unkind; and if somebody had done it to you, I know what you would say."

"What now, dear, good Pru.?"

"You would say, I hate the man; and perhaps, even if you loved him ever so much, would never speak to him again."

"And pray will you do the same?" asked Lotty, smiling.

"No, I am not Lotty. I do not pretend to be anything but poor Pru."

"And therefore much more to be loved than naughty Lotty. So now that we are friends, take care of one thing. I may fancy Mr. Grey, myself."

"Then, dear Lotty, you will be a happy woman."

"Now, that is very magnanimous of you,

Pru.; but there are two reasons against my ever marrying Mr. Grey, even if I did fancy him."

"And what can they be, dear Lotty?"

"He loves some other person better than me, and Bear is decidedly against the connection. See, he looks quite fierce at the notion."

"Our Lotty is very silly sometimes, is she not, Charlotte? but her little eccentricities serve her purpose; which is, to make us smile."

"But I don't quite think this business was fair," began Pru.

"It was most unpardonable; but you had better say no more, for Mr. Grey is at the door," answered Lotty.

"And why should he not hear what you are saying?" said he; being nearer than even Lotty deemed him.

"Because 'love lies bleeding' is not the other name for 'London Pride,' and you think it is," answered Lotty, promptly.

"Humph!" said he, gravely; but his eyes twinkled.

CHAPTER IV.

Sadly and sorrowfully Margaret walked hour after hour by the heedless waves. It was at Lady Montagu's wish they had gone to the sea-side; she felt that the longer Margaret refrained from seeing the cause of her sad fate, the more nervously would the fear of doing so distress her. Once recover from this shock, then would her patient, pious heart turn to the world, to fulfil the work she had to do therein. They had no fear for the consequences; they let her indulge herself to the full; pouring out her griefs; upbraiding that cruel, remorseless sea—yet loved, touched, looked on, as the vast tomb of her Harold.

It was Lotty's custom to sit at a distance

and watch her Margaret; she seemed to know by intuition the auspicious moment to join her. And Lady Montagu would feel that evening was a bright one to her, if Margaret's fair cheek had the faintest bloom on it.

One day, as Lotty sat at her post of observation, she saw coming down on to the sands, a stout lady, dressed in such a profusion of colours, it cost her some trouble to reckon them all up. A pink parasol was prominent; a sort of yellow-ochre shawl enveloped her large person, showing portions of a bright green silk dress beneath. Her bonnet was tastefully done up at all points with little blue feathers, that, irritated in every tender fibre by the sharp sea-breeze, raised themselves into odd shapes and positions, giving the bonnet, for the nonce, a strong resemblance to a frizzled fowl. The sand was soft and heavy, so that she left large, deep prints of a substantial foot, as she laboured through it. She was followed by three nurses, each carrying a pale, pasty-looking baby. Every baby being conspicuous in gorgeous clothing, and waving plumes.

Lotty watched Bear make a circumbendibus all round this party, who huddled together at the sight of him, like a flock of alarmed sheep. The lady especially tossed down her pink parasol, and spread out her ample green skirts after the fashion of a fearful hen.

"Bear, who is it?" said Lotty, to that discerning individual; "it can be no one we know. Oh! you think it is. Let us go and warn Margaret then."

"Margaret, see, there is Carry!" said Lotty, to her.

"Ah, no, Lotty; the sylph-like Carry can never have expanded into that species of person," answered Margaret.

"It is Carry," persisted Lotty; "look at the babies."

"The small one looks rather like the one she brought down to Court Leigh, Lotty."

"About the eyes especially," answered Lotty, "and also in regard to a certain uncertainty as to the safety of its head. I always felt averse to taking it, lest that important article should roll off. I will send Bear

to inquire. Now, old fellow, go and do your duty. If that is an old friend, salute her like a gentleman, and touch your hat."

"They will be alarmed at Bear," interrupted Margaret.

"Then you are not to go too near, Bear, or you will send those babies into convulsions. There, Margaret! it is Carry. Look at Bear, how sulky he is; he knows he must behave like a gentleman, and salute her, but he is thoroughly ashamed of the acquaintance. She is much too smart for his homely ideas."

"Then, Lotty, we must also go and pay our respects."

It was, indeed, their old school-fellow, who greeted them in a most cordial manner; considering, as Lotty said afterwards, they were not babies, and had none with them.

"Oh!" said Carry, "I really am delighted to see you. I shall have such pleasure in showing you my darling children. Nurse, put Cecil down, that Lady Leigh may see how nicely he walks."

Cecil whimpered.

"Oh! never mind then, nurse; you shall not walk, my darling, if you don't like. Some day, Margaret, when you are on the sands, and he happens to be down on his legs, I will just give you a signal to come up quietly without his knowing, because he is so very shy. And see, I must introduce you to my little Arabella. Belle, Bella! look up, mamma's pet, look up, my darling! Nurse, do you think she seems inclined to kiss her hand?"

"No, ma'am, I don't think she looks inclined to day; she is a little put out, ma'am, by the dog."

"Oh! then, we will not force her; I make a point, my dear Margaret, of never asking my children to do what they don't like. And doesn't she like the nasty, ugly dog? Ah! naughty beast, go away; Bella shall have a stick, and beat him, a pet!"

Arabella got up a ray of intelligence into her countenance upon this announcement. Luckily, Bear bounded off, to some interesting natural specimen of a sea-weed, the pecu-

liar odour of which seemed to excite his canine disgust.

"And now, nurse, show Lady Leigh the baby. Robert won't look at her, because she is a girl, and he wanted another boy; but she is much the flower of all my pets."

Certainly, the baby was larger, fatter, and more flabby-looking than what Cecil had been at her age.

"Little pet!" said the fond mother, kissing her. "By-the-by, Margaret, how is your poor boy—did you ever rear him? I am so much out of the world now, and am so occupied with my darlings, that I hear no news of any sort or kind, except that some one of the name of Leigh, it struck me, I had seen was dead, in the newspaper." Here she looked up, and the pure, Madonna-like face of Margaret, appearing from beneath the close white cap, and deep black bonnet and veil, struck on her baby-locked mind. "Oh, I beg your pardon!—I really forgot!"

"Pray don't apologize," said Lotty, "for either of us, as we can fully believe that the

care of such babies must make you forget everything."

"Well, Lotty, if I did not know that you were very good-natured, I should say that you spoke ironically," said Mrs. Royston, getting red.

"If you take it as ironical, pray do. But I do not see why you have not as much right to think of nothing but your babies, as a fisherman has of fishing."

"But I did not mean to be unkind, Lotty."

"I am persuaded of that," said Margaret, gently; "so, pray make no more excuses. My little boy is quite well, thank you; I left him with his sister and the nurse just by those rocks that you see half a mile off. He was intent upon making a fortification on the sand."

"Good heavens! Did you leave them all alone, with only their nurse, and such a number of ill-looking fishermen about?"

"I have done the same for the last month, Carry, without any harm arising therefrom."

"Nurse, turn the baby's head this way now, I begin to feel a little breeze from the sea;

and, Betsy, you do the same by Arabella. That's my pets!" continued Mrs. Royston; and they were both kissed by their mother, for submitting to the change without much whimpering.

"And so you have a little girl, Margaret? What a comfort that is! And is she a nice, healthy child—or has she the same fearful tendency to fits that your poor boy had?"

"She is healthy and strong, thank you," began Margaret.

"And little Harold never had a fit in his life," interrupted Lotty.

"Dear me, how strange! I have always felt so much for you, dear Margaret, wondering what you would do if you lost him suddenly—"

"Good-bye, Carry," said Lotty, abruptly; "I must go and see what my pet is making such a fuss about."

"I did not know Lotty had a child," said Mrs. Royston, looking round, as the little, indignant thing went off.

"Her pet is her dog," answered Margaret.

"How sad," said Carry, "that she should waste her time and affections upon such a great brute! Did it frighten my darling? Never mind, we will soon beat him away."

"I hope Mr. Royston is quite well," said the gentle Margaret.

"Indeed I know nothing about him," answered Carry, with asperity; "he insisted upon going to see some races, though the doctor especially enjoined the darlings going to the sea-side; so, of course, if he neglected his duty to his children, I was not so unfeeling.—Nurse, throw their veils up, the breeze is gone again."

"Good-bye, Carry, for the present," said Margaret.

"Good-bye, dear. I would offer to accompany you on your walk, for it is quite a pleasure to see you once again, and I should like to have a long talk with you about our children; but, you see, I never leave them. Every moment requires a change—(nurse, turn their heads this way)—which none but a fond mo-

ther can see. But I should like to call upon you, and have a chat about happy old times."

Lotty, as if intuitively knowing that Carry was only adding stab to stab, now called Margaret, and they left the sands in the peaceable possession of Mrs. Royston and her nursery. The next day, Lotty besought Margaret to go out at an unusual hour. She had made it her business, in the early morning, to discover Mrs. Royston's sea-side habits, and, for several days, was successful in avoiding a collision; but Mrs. Royston discovered that all the world in that small sea-bathing place were thinking and talking of nothing but the fair, pale mourners, clad both in such deep crape; and the interest and excitement about them was none the less from the seclusion in which they lived. Their history was too well known, through public report, for them to hope they were unrecognized. But the fact gained them this advantage—they were never intruded upon.

Curious eyes, from a distance, might scan their every movement with interest, while ga-

thered groups would meet only to discuss some new fact concerning them ; but the hard hand of fate had so oppressed them, a sacred air seemed to hallow the spot they breathed in, rendering it too holy for busy, bustling, worldly thoughts to enter. Thus, with a rare feeling of delicacy—a feeling they warmly appreciated—it was sufficient for Lady Leigh to select her portion of the sands, and none intruded on her. Nevertheless, the little world of health-seekers, pleasure-hunters, pebble-finders, bathers, sketchers, and all that incongruous crowd who frequent a watering-place, each, for different reasons of their own, indemnified themselves for their forbearance by talking.

Thus Carry found herself, on a sudden, elevated to a pinnacle of wonder and interest that she had never gained, even as the mother of the most charming babes in the world, merely because she was seen speaking, on apparently intimate terms, with the objects of their devoted attention. And when it was discovered she had actually been at school with both of them, and bridesmaid to one of

them, she was nearly torn to pieces (metaphorically) with visits and questions. The three lovely babies stood in great danger of being neglected, while Carry was undergoing the trying ordeal of being a popular character.

On the third day, she announced her intention of calling. Several parties invited themselves to a sea-side tea on her return, that they might gain the earliest particulars of the visit, and be ready to retail them all at bathing-time next morning. So Carry departed, aware that from every window of the Crescent her progress would be watched, until she arrived at the little, insulated, ivy-bound villa, in which her school-fellows had secluded themselves and their sorrows. She was gorgeously apparelled for the occasion, and the three white, watery-eyed babies shone conspicuous in crimson feathers, and broad red sashes to match; whereby the youngest of all seemed rather to be composed entirely of sash, without reference to anything of the baby-kind. It was a strange, incongruous company that was thus shewn into the cool, dark drawing-room, where

the holy spirit of pious, patient grief sat enthroned.

"Well, dear Margaret, I have brought the dear children with me; I thought they would serve to amuse you and divert your thoughts. But, Lotty, would you oblige me by turning out that horrid dog? My darling Arabella is beginning to whimper already."

"Bear, go away," said the Little Bear, in her most morose mood.

Bear arose majestically, and casting a glance of mingled contempt and disgust upon Mrs. Royston as he passed her, he reared himself up to his full proportions, and, with wonderful skill, got out of the window and disappeared.

"Law!" said Carry, rather alarmed, "what an odd dog! did you teach him that, Lotty?"

"I never teach Bear anything but to love me," answered the Little Bear, with the nearest attempt to a growling tone she could accomplish.

"It is very wonderful, Mrs. Royston," said Lady Montagu, "to see how that dog understands Mrs. Leigh. You need not be under

any alarm about your children, for I can assure you he is more like an old nurse with little Harold and his sister."

"Dear me! are they not afraid of him?"

"On the contrary, they think no treat so great as a romp with Bear. His services are often required to amuse baby, when Margaret lays her on the floor, during the nurse's meals."

"I should like to see your children very much, Margaret," said Carry, secretly wishing to compare such an apparently ill-used baby with her own, so much more carefully nursed.

They were brought down; and even in the half-withered heart of Margaret there rose a deep feeling of pride and delight as she showed her dead Harold's princely boy to her schoolfellow. While Lotty recovered her good-humour, as she took in her arms the little, laughing, crowing babe, fair, fresh, and sweet as new-plucked violets—a striking contrast with her dark, intelligent eyes and rosy baby beauty, to the poor, little sash-laden Royston baby.

"Make your bow, Sir Harold," said the nurse, "and shake hands with the young gentleman."

Little Harold obeyed with the gravity and propriety of a highly-bred young courtier, and then looking round, said, "Where is Bear?"

At the sound of his name, a pair of deep-set eyes, and fine drooping ears, became visible over the window-sill.

"Oh! don't let him come in!" cried Mrs. Royston, who was beginning to think Bear something of the demoniacal order.

Bear showed all his fangs, as he smiled a grim, sardonic smile of scorn, and disappeared.

"Bear is a good dog, ma'am," said young Harold, eyeing her with irrepressible curiosity.

"Ah! my dear, you don't know what he might do if you were alone with him; he might eat you up, for he is as big as a wolf."

"He would eat the wolf up, or kill him as Gelert did, Prince Llewellyn's dog."

"I do not know Prince Llewellyn, dear; but if I was your mamma, I would not trust you an only son, and likely to be so, and a

title to keep up, with such a great beast as that."

The greater part of this speech being Greek to young Harold, he contented himself with asking if he should read to her the history of Prince Llewellyn.

"Read! good heavens! Margaret, do you mean to tell me your boy reads at his age? He'll die of water on the brain, mark my word."

"It is rather too soon to teach him much; but having, for his own amusement, shewn him the letters, he has almost taught himself the words."

"It's wonderful, he continues to look so healthy," answered Mrs. Royston, scanning the fine straight limbs of the boy, and unable to detect a flaw in the beautiful, blooming face. "And how old is baby? I do not remember to have seen her birth in the paper."

"My little grand-daughter," answered Lady Montagu, with solemn gravity, "is eight months old; she came to bless her mother's

life with a new interest, at a time when God seemed to have forsaken her."

"She is a gift from the sea," murmured Lotty, kissing her little namesake and god-child.

"Are your children strong and healthy?" asked Margaret, whose cheeks flushed and paled with every word, for all she spoke so calmly.

This proved a fortunate question in some respects, for though it led Mrs. Royston into a long and uninteresting history of her three children, and the showing forth of their various perfections and talents, it was only tiresome, and not wounding. Once upon the topic, like a good hound in full cry, Mrs. Royston nor stopped, nor stayed for any other matter, and the rest of her visit passed off pretty well.

Upon her return to her own house, she was enabled to report a vast quantity of new materials to the general fund of conversation. And though these were somewhat mixed up with "I gave her my mind; and I told her

what I did in Cecil's case; and I advised her to treat her exactly as I did Arabella," with further enlightenments regarding those interesting points, yet they learnt many new facts. Such as—"The boy was called Sir Harold already by his nurse. The girl was eight months' old, and born very mysteriously. The young Sir Harold could read, and had a very broad forehead, indicative of water on the brain. Mrs. Leigh wore no widow's cap in the house, but Lady Leigh looked all cap, her face was so small and thin. The nurse kissed the baby, just as if it was her own, and ordered young Sir Harold about as if he was only a common boy. But Lady Leigh was given that way, she had always allowed her servants to take liberties. Young Sir Harold wore a common brown Holland pinafore, and the great dog was a demon, just that and no more."

By the next morning, all these interesting particulars had increased tenfold; consequently, whenever Bear inadvertently, allured by an innocent hilarity, ventured to extend

his gallops beyond a certain verge, a general flight of brown straw hats, frantic nurses, and alarmed children, took place, clearing the sands like magic.

Having gained her purpose, namely, that Margaret should get over the first shock of seeing that remorseless, but beautiful destroyer of her happiness, Lady Montagu proposed a return home

A third visit from Carry hastened them. They could not hope she would always talk of her children, and even that hope, as Lotty said, "she wished was safely deposited in Pandora's box." The hope was becoming worse than the disease.

* * * *

They found Lady Katherine overflowing with health and delight at seeing them ; Pru., thin, nervous, and fidgetty ; Mr. Grey, solemn and silent, very unusual for him.

"Pru., what have you been doing to Mr. Grey ?" said Lotty, severely.

"Oh ! my dear, dear Lotty ! I do not know.

I am so unhappy, I have been longing for you every day."

"Have you refused the poor man?" again asked the stern little questioner. "For if you have, I shall be obliged to ask Bear's consent to marry him myself."

Here Pru. wept, and between sobs and tears, much misgivings, and great takings on, Lotty made out that Mr. Grey talked of going away, leaving Rose Leigh, High Leigh, all the Leighs, as soon as he could find a substitute.

"Alack and alas! this happens because I went away."

"Of course it does, dear Lotty."

"He thinks he ought to leave, because he loves you, and must not take advantage of Lady Katherine's present bias in his favour."

"Yes, indeed, dear Lotty, that is just it, if you will not think me very conceited."

"No! not very; but I think he carries his ideas of honour too far."

"Yes, yes, a great deal; indeed, indeed, Lotty, he is far too honourable."

"Well, that is not a fashionable crime: so you think he loves you?"

"Yes, dear Lotty," answered Pru., blushing and faltering. "Though he rarely speaks to me, he always does everything for me."

"As how?"

"He always opens the door for me, and always sets my chair, and he watches me silently, and he picks up my knotting."

"Poor man! he must be worked to death. And does your mother say nothing?"

"No! she only seems to like him more every day, and she calls him John: think of that now, Lotty!"

"Humph! and do you call him John?"

"Oh, no! Lotty; how can you think so, or that I would so far forget myself?"

"I'll bet you a lock of Bear's hair against one of Mr. Grey's, that you call him John soon."

"Lotty, Lotty! you are no wiser since you went to the sea-side—you will joke."

"We met Mrs. Royston there, which was no joke. Now, dry your eyes, look happy, and

try to sit still for an hour; then if I find you have done so, and are a good girl, I may have some news for you. Kiss me, just to show we are friends."

"As if I ever thought otherwise, Lotty."

An hour afterwards, Margaret was seated with Lady Katherine.

"Mother," said the low, soft voice, like a gentle breath blowing through myrtle leaves, "Mr. Grey talks of leaving us."

"Ah, my daughter, my child, say not so—what should I be without him?"

"He loves our Charlotte now, as he did ten years ago."

"Is it true? can so great a blessing be vouchsafed to me, unworthy sinner as I am? Ah! Margaret, but for him I never should have borne the sight of your sweet face again. But for him I never would have knelt to the God I so sinned against."

"I know it, mother: it is my wish, it has long been so, that you should give him the sacred title of son."

"Bless you! Heaven bless my Margaret! I

know not which way my weak, foolish feet would lead me, but for his sustaining arm. I am but a child, Margaret, in such ways, still blindly stumbling among all my former wicked sins."

"Nay, mother, think not thus; a loss such as ours, leads us straight to God's footstool. But Mr. Grey—he thinks if he asked you now for our Charlotte, you would not refuse, but he fears you would repent hereafter."

"Never, never; ah! Margaret, how can I convince him?"

"You must speak to him, mother, and learn his real feelings. Then you must say (after he has really told you he loves her), that I would take it kindly of him, if he will occupy in your bereaved heart the place of my Harold."

"Ah! my daughter."

"Yes, mother, it is so. Then if his feelings are still scrupulous, we must send for Basil. Perhaps our Lotty may devise something."

"That she has done already," said Lotty, entering as she spoke. "I have told him that

even if Gerald Herbert does come home, you are going to build a new church. I am going to endow it, and he will be required to serve it. I also gave him a sermon, under three heads, with an excellent text, on the folly of being too scrupulous, and the inconvenience of having an undue proportion of conscientiousness. And that the heart of an honest, good man, showed its sense by acting with calm discretion and judgment, and not flighting violently off into most uncomfortable but grandly heroic acts, that generally killed two or three people at the onset, and made all the rest so miserable, they wished themselves dead also. 'For my part,' I said, 'when I see a man acting in an outrageous manner, I mean outraging nature, and all the good feelings we get from Heaven, because he fears the world may deem him acting an interested part, I then think he is an hypocrite. Most part of his feelings regard himself, and the rest are worth nothing, because they are founded on nothing.' Whereat he winced capitally, Queen Margaret. All men are weak on some point, and Mr. Grey's is a desire to be thought highly sincere."

"He is a good, excellent man, and I would he were my son, Lotty, if I am worthy to have such," said Lady Katherine.

"I think he is going to speak to you, the first opportunity, madam; for as I said to him, 'Do you mean us to go down on our knees, and ask you to become connected with us?' he reddened in a violent, great blush, and said, 'God forbid that I should expect as a right, what I would beseech as Heaven's best boon.' Rather pretty; I have treasured up the words for Pru.'s benefit, some day."

"Where is he now?" asked Margaret.

"He is perambulating the cedar walk. I know, by the expression of his face, and the manner of his walk, he is going to search his heart, and lay it before God. He is a good man, truly, but I fear he would have borne his own burden of the flesh bravely and silently, save for Pru.'s sake. So you like my Lairds, Margaret?"

"Yes, Lotty, how they love you! Ah! my little Lotty, what did I not hear of you?"

"I am afraid, dear child, you must have

suffered much with poor Philip," said Lady Katherine.

"Nay, madam, ask Mrs. Laird; she will tell you I was aye a feckless bairn, and no fit for a wife. Margaret, don't you love Miss Rachel?"

"Yes, Lotty, with a strange love too; it is so unlike anything I ever felt before for any one."

"Come, come, I shall be jealous; but in her quiet, simple, earnest manner, I see always before me the wise virgin, with her lamp trimmed, waiting with wistful, loving eyes, the coming of her lord. She has had much sorrow."

"And the last brimmed her cup."

"For a time, Margaret. For she says, now she can see the vista of a peaceful close to her life, the only time of rest she has ever enjoyed. I like to see you together. You are the stricken angel whose dove's wings are shattered and broken; she is the grave pilgrim, quietly marching, with upturned face, over the cutting stones and rude paths of this earth, unheeding aught but the light beyond."

"She does me good, Lotty.

"I know it, Margaret. Hand-in-hand, your treasure and hers passed into the rough sea of death together. Hand-in-hand you two will walk through life, supporting each other in the same hope and wish.—But here comes Mr. Grey. See, Margaret, his step is firm, his head thrown back, his eyes bright. He and his conscience have settled the matter comfortably. He is coming straight to ask Lady Katherine to be his mother, like an honest English gentleman."

"Dear Lady Katherine!" said Mr. Grey, approaching her at once, on entering, without heeding Margaret and Lotty, "may I be your son? May I express the love that has been so long burning in my heart for your Charlotte, and ask her to be my wife?"

Old Lady Katherine elevated herself to her utmost height, as she would have done in former days, on some grand court day. But this time her only motive was to put her arms round Mr. Grey's neck, and say: "God bless

you, my son, my dear son! for making me thus happy."

"But you?" said Mr. Grey, turning half to Margaret, while he supported Lady Katherine still.

"I wish you to be Harold to her," said Margaret.

"Are they not too kind, Mrs. Leigh? Tell me, am I not too presumptuous?"

"Yes, a great deal. How do you know if Pru. will have you?" answered she.

"Oh! go for her, send for my Charlotte. Let me know ere I sleep to-night, that this happiness is really to be mine," cried Lady Katherine.

"I will seek her," said Lotty; "for I agree with you, the sooner we get the matter settled the better."

"Pru., Pru.," said she, on discovering the object of her search, still sitting where she had left her; "your mother wants you immediately to knot."

"I will come," said Pru., with sighing meekness.

"She does not require you for the usual sort of knotting, but for quite a new kind of work, which may be styled knitting knots," continued the naughty little, flighty Lotty, as they went down stairs.

"Knotting is rather wearisome," sighed Pru.

"Well, if this new work proves so, whistle for Bear, and he will undo it all."

This time Lady Katherine did not insist upon the offer taking place under the walnut trees, in full sight of her decorous eyes. But Pru. found herself, all of a sudden, alone, in the small green drawing-room with Mr. Grey; and before she had time to recover that fact, he had gently drawn her close to his heart, and was beseeching her with eyes and speech, to bless him with the gift of her heart, and suffer him to call by the holy name of "wife," the woman he had loved so long and well.

CHAPTER V.

Miss Rachel Clare was a woman with whom the world had dealt hardly from her earliest childhood. Her father was no whit behind any of the Clares in vice and wickedness, but had distinguished himself among them, by breaking the heart of a gentle, amiable wife, causing the early deaths of all his children, save two, from harshness and privations, and grinding down his poor daughter's soul to the extremest point of suffering and degradation; until, fortunately for her, and the little baby sister, whom all had cared for, in the midst of their troubles, the measure of his iniquities was completed. He was called to his account.

Upon his death, Miss Clare found herself

and her little sister totally destitute. But now that her fate was in her own hands, it was no part of her creed to endure the worst suffering of all, namely, a precarious dependance upon the scant, humiliating charity of her relations.

She opened a day school, and toiled early and late the first year, to make both ends meet. She was successful beyond her hopes, though her exertions and anxieties paled her cheek for ever, and caused the grey hairs of age to take early possession of their place. She had but one pleasure, the love of her little sister; and as she bloomed into the beauty peculiar to the Clares, she gave greater proofs of goodness than were usual in that family. Rachel still worked harder than she ought, to give her little Fanny all the advantages she was born to, and perhaps was somewhat injudicious in suffering the pretty, little, gay girl, to taste of pleasures, however sparingly, in which she did not share. A little wilfulness was beginning to spring up on the part of Fanny, which was just shadowing out

an ominous cloud of further sorrow for Rachel, when a terrible, fearful death put an end to both feelings for ever.

The first breath of this awful intelligence came upon Rachel like a withering simoom. They had parted in anger. The elder sister remembered the sharp words of reproof with which she had dismissed her wilful Fanny—yet her darling, her pride, her sole happiness. Never more should she hear the little, soft lips beseech the pardon she was sure to demand; never more should she press them again in full forgiveness. The time was past, gone: unforgiven — unkissed — unblest, the little, girlish thing of sixteen had met a terrible fate, with no tender ear to hear her last cries of despair; no fond, sisterly arm, to become her sheltering tomb. Unable to save, yet happy to die, so that they had died together, was Rachel's thought. There were none to sympathise with her — none to console. The Clares were but little loved, and in the eyes of the world, the terrible death of one rich and well-born, like Sir Harold Leigh, absorbed all

interest, leaving none to bestow upon the young and thoughtless girl.

Nothing was now left to her but to die. She prayed of God to take her, that she might the sooner meet the little spirit scared from its earthly tenement so fearfully; and yet reason and life remained to her.

How long the struggle might have lasted, it is hard to say; but, like a messenger from her little sister, came Lord Erlscourt, bearing in his hand, not only her last words from the sea, but the consoling sympathy of hearts, mourning still more deeply than her own. She was ready to perform the bidding of those who were henceforward to be connected with her by sorrow, that strong binder of heart to heart.

She barely took time to read her Fanny's dying words, so urged was she in spirit, to adjourn at once to a country and people where sympathy would hallow her grief and render it bearable. Away from Cowes, the scene of all her hard life, she might hope to find consolation in thinking of her little one;

she could better school herself to endure her loss, take comfort from her words, and look on grief more bitter than her own.

With Fanny's letter close to her heart, the poor lonely Rachel left Cowes in Lord Erlscourt's company the same evening; and ere she arrived at her future abode, the Rectory, gratitude and hope brought a pulse of life into it. She looked with interest at her new home, around which no painful recollections gathered themselves, and thought that ease and comfort would now be hers, for Lord Erlscourt's arrangement was riches to her. Under these circumstances she could read and weep over her Fanny's letter, without feeling that God had entirely deserted her. But when she saw that pale, stricken wife, within whose shadowy eyes there dwelt a look so sad, so desolate, yet withal so resigned and unearthlike, she folded her hands in prayer to God, beseeching Him to look down in pitying love upon such woe.

And then she joined her efforts to those of

all around her, to watch over and guard that "wearied and heavy-laden" mourner.

She placed in poor Margaret's hands, without a word, her treasured letter, over which she nightly prayed, rightly judging that the artless words would have their due effect. It was as follows, partly written by Sir Harold and partly by the little girl herself, just aged sixteen.

"My mother-sister, your Fanny will never see you more. Is not that sorrow enough to break her heart?—and yet there is something worse before her. Great waves are rising high on every side, and they rush in anger on our ship. Oh! sister, your little Fanny sees them coming, and knows they will soon engulf her, and she will be but a little reed, broken and crushed in those wild waters. Your little, petted, indulged Fanny, who would have shrunk at the touch of death, even circled in your dear arms. But there is one very kind and good to me, Sir Harold Leigh; he writes these words for me, because I tremble, sister. I think how I left you in anger, but if God

hears the prayers of such a little thing as I am, He will hear me asking pardon of you, my only mother. But I must drown in those dreadful waves, and never hear you say, 'I love my Fanny more than all the world.' Sir Harold says God hears my slightest word, even in this wild tumult. I pray that he may not hear poor Augusta—she raves. And yet she leaves none behind her to mourn as that Margaret will, whom Sir Harold names with every prayer, or even as my Rachel, when she hears of her little Fanny's doom. He has read to me that Holy Book, and he has prayed for me, because I am so weak and trembling, sister. I think if we had parted in love, I might have been braver, I might have been sure that God would listen to my prayer. But, sister-mother, he says I must comfort you. What shall I say? You will look at his Margaret, and then feel that your loss is as a drop of water to her ocean of grief. And if I am wayward now, I might have become worse. Sister, perhaps God has taken me from the evil to come. I think to myself,

it will be but one shock, and then I shall be safe in Heaven, and can never more be wilful and disobedient. I might have become very naughty. I felt pleased to be thought like Augusta, and oh! Rachel, if you could see her now,—God have pity on her! No prayer comes from her lips—she cannot hear the Holy Book—she will not listen to the calm words of resignation, that Sir Harold has for all—yes, all of us. He has gone on deck, and said, if I wrote but one line, it would comfort you. And I make the trial, if it is but to tell you, Rachel, that this good and noble man has saved his soul, I feel; for during these three days of anguish and fear, he has been the comforter, the supporter of all. The meanest man among the crew, receives from him the same care and thought that I do, a little, weak, timid girl. By his piety, fortitude, and solemn preparation for death, he has nerved many a weak soul on board; and when our awful summons comes, he will take with him, in the same hour that his own soul is required, all those whom he has thus fortified. They

look at him with wonder and admiration. And I like to think, sister, that perhaps already the Holy Son of God is hovering halfway between heaven and earth, ready to take the fine and noble spirit so fitted for Paradise, at once there. And I may hope to go with him, and many others think as I do, I know. And, Rachel, you will be able to tell her this, that Margaret whom he says will comfort you, she will like to know that this Harold, whom she loves so well, made a little weak girl fearless and resigned, by his noble example. The ship drives so, Rachel, you must not think I tremble now by my writing. In a short time all will be over. When you mourn for Fanny, remember who has lost a Harold, and thank God, that you may endeavour to comfort her. For, dear sister-mother, a lifetime thus spent, would be all too little to repay what he has done, through the mercy of Jesus Christ, for the soul of your little, fond, loving Fanny."

CHAPTER VI.

So Lotty's birthday came again. And the snow was deep on the ground, and the branches of the trees were all marked out in pure white lines against the deep, blue sky.

Lotty and Bear were out walking, and the crisp snow sounded under their feet as they went, with a cheerful, pleasant noise; and Lotty's breath rose up in the clear, frosty air, like a little tiny cloud, while Bear's enveloped him all in a mist, that settled itself in small icicles over his bristles, ears, and coat, making him look, for the nonce, an aged, grey-haired dog.

They had had a very busy past year, and had done a great many things, and now they

were looking forward to this year as one which should raise the heavy pressure of grief from the hearts they loved best, and permit the dim eyes of sorrow to look once more with pleasure on the world in which they lived.

Fresh, bright, beautiful frost! No wonder Lotty and Bear bounded along as if still very childish, both of them.

They were going to High Leigh in the early morning, to see Mr. and Mrs. Laird, get a cup of milk, warm from Mrs. Laird's beautiful Ayrshire cow, and be back by Margaret's breakfast hour.

"Ech, bairn! but ye luik like a rosebud the morn. And sae ye air nineteen years awld the day. One wouldn't think it, to luik at her, Aleck! but she has had a world o' sorrow to mak up. Ye ought to hae been greyheaded the noo, bairn, wi' a' yer troubles."

"You see I have such a hard heart, Mrs. Laird."

"Hard heart! at no hand, bairn, say that; if yer heart is hard, whatten a sort o' heart hae ither folks getten? Hae ye ony news for us?"

"Yes, you are to please to come and dine to-day, you and the doctor, at Court Leigh."

"And wha will we meet, think you?"

"First, there will be Lady Katherine."

"Ech! puir bit silly body, she has nae such sense as even the big doggie."

"But it is better to see her so humble and child-like as she is, Mrs. Laird, than what she was before."

"I dinna luve to see auld, ancient folks like her, leaning on little bairns like you, for counsel and advice. It's no natural; and when ye are to the fore, or the pretty Lady Leigh, she'll no step the floor, unless ye advise her."

"That is her humility; she wishes to make up to Lady Leigh for the great sorrow of her life, and so trusts her, like a little child."

"It's no canny, my bairn, and she must ay hae been but a silly body, at the best; sae gang on wi' the rest, though she be the grandest leddy there."

"Then there is Lord Erlscourt, and his two brothers."

"I'll ay hae to pit on a' my best claithes.

Them is folk now, and I maun tell the doctor to hae his finest wits about him."

"Are you afraid of Lord Erlscourt, Mrs. Laird?"

"Na, na, bairn, but we maun ay pay respect to our betters."

"But ye would not put on your best gown for Lady Katherine."

"Hoot, bairn! you're no wise the morn. Div ye no see the differ atween a man like my Laird Erlscourt and thon? I'm thinking there ne'er was a body like him for sense and goodness, whether he is a laird, or no but a common mon, like my doctor. Ay, me! but I'll pit on my cap o' Limerick lace. And wha else, ye bit thing?"

"There will be Mr. Frank, and Mrs. Frank."

"Ay! them's nice people, heartsome folk; and though she's a bit, joost ye ken, stiff-like, I'm thinking it's muir shyness than pride. And they bit bonnie twins. Nae wonder to see their father doighted about them."

"But the twins won't dine with us."

"Come, come, nane o' yer clavers; ye mak

nae jokes o' me, ye bit mischief! I'll be axing ye next if Bear is to be at the banquet, wi' a new pin-behind on."

"Pin-behind!" echoed Lotty.

"Ay, bairn, most folks ca's them pin-befores, which is a mair purpose-like fib than most. And wha else div ye expect?"

"There will be two of my brothers, and some more of my people—"

"The mair the better, say I," interrupted Mrs. Laird.

"And Miss Leigh and Mr. Grey, and Rachel—"

"Ay, my word, to think of ye being such a match-maker. They tell me, as you telled that puir, silly body, Lady Katherine, it wad be a guid thing did her and him marry. And she said 'Ay,' at the first word."

"Don't you think it will be a nice thing for all parties?"

"I see nothing agin it, more belike, if they dinna mak up their minds soon, they maun just let it be. They're no sae young. And hae ye any ither body coming?"

"Yes, there are a Mr. and Mrs. Bankes, who came unexpectedly last night without an invitation. But we think they will not stay very long."

"I ay like to see new folks, but I dinna think I'll get fond of them. I never heard ye say their names afore, so I'm spearing that they'll be no just what me and Alick will cotton to."

"Oh! Mrs. Laird, don't be prejudiced, you will find Mrs. Bankes a very chatty, lively woman; and Mr. Bankes very gentlemanly and quiet. But I must go now, or I shall be late for breakfast."

"Well, gang awa wi' ye. I ken by yer een them new folks is naething to ye, and yer having yer fun o' me. But here, tak a present fra' the doctor and me. Could we gie ye what we wish, it wad be a' we had, and oursels besides, ye bit bonny, lovesome thing!"

And Mrs. Laird kissed the rosy face again and again, until Bear got frightfully jealous, and walked off sulking, with his tail between his legs.

Who was shortly after met by Basil; and though both knew Lotty was but two steps behind, yet they took no notice of her, but talked to each other, as if Basil was as much accustomed to confide his thoughts to Bear, as ever Lotty was.

"So! Bear, little Lotty has offended you, has she?"

"I wish you would not call me little Lotty, Basil, it really is not proper," said Lotty, from behind.

"But she is very little, is she not, Bear?" said Basil, going on, as if not hearing her. "So we must put up with a great deal of nonsense in her, because she is so."

"Nonsense, indeed!" said the voice behind.

"And we both know, that though so little, she is very well-meaning in all she says and does. Eh, Bear?"

"Much obliged for such an opinion," from behind.

"And considering that she is only nineteen years old to-day, Bear, we must not expect her to be so wise as we are. When she is

about forty, perhaps we may see her grave and serious like us."

"Ha! indeed!" from behind.

"In the meantime, Bear, supposing she should be, what Mrs. Laird says, a myth, a fairy angel strayed away, and that she should suddenly fly off and leave us. What would Lady Katherine do? Go after her, Bear, I think, as fast as she could hobble. And gentle Pru.? and warm-hearted Pro.? why, I think they would run after her also, with a little, twin girl in each arm. Then Mr. and Mrs. Laird, Mr. Grey, and all the Beauvillians, flying the same way."

"How absurd you are this morning, Basil!" said the voice behind.

"But as for Queen Margaret, Bear, little Lotty could not slip away, without telling her where to follow. And if Queen Margaret remained behind, we should have the little myth back again. So you and I, Bear, will ever keep by Queen Margaret's side, then shall we be sure of seeing that little, wild Lotty."

"Not so sure as you think," was heard in a very sulky voice. "And I always thought you so sensible, Basil."

"We never can be sensible when Lotty is near, can we, Bear? she is so—"

"Come, Bear, come to me; you are hearing very foolish things, and must listen no longer."

"Ah, Lotty, how strange of you to be a listener! Now, it is one of the last things I should have supposed you—"

"Pray don't suppose any more things about me, Lord Erlscourt."

"Oh! we are proud, are we?"

"That is better than being silly."

"How can one help it on such a day? I rose up intoxicated with joy, and seeing a fairy footfall on the fresh snow, I came in pursuit. And I was merely following your example, confiding my feelings to Bear."

"That reminds me, I really wish to know, Basil, how you, of whom I always held so high an opinion, could be so mean as to listen to a private conversation?"

"I did not mean to be so mean, I assure

you; but I thought the first time I fell into the snare, that you were talking to me. Upon hearing the name of Bear, I immediately departed, not to intrude on a *tête-à-tête*."

"And may I ask what you did hear?"

"I agreed in one opinion very strongly, and whether to admire you or Bear most I did not know. You said you would not be Flo., and Bear said he would not be Carry. Ah, Lotty, my sweet, dear Lotty! I did not mean to vex you; don't you know that I think—"

"I do not care what you think!" as passionate tears burst from her eyes.

"Then, upon my honour, I heard no more than that, Lotty, and it was quite accidental; and, much as I was tickled with the conceit of the thing, I honourably went away."

"Why did you not say so at once, Basil?"

"Because I am such a weak, foolish fellow. I enjoyed seeing you put out."

"Then you shall have no such enjoyment again."

"Sweet Lotty! tell me with your truthful eyes that you are not really offended. I fol-

lowed you out, that I might be the first to give you the best wishes of the day, that I might make you my little present, and apart from the crowd of birth-day gifts that I know are to be showered upon you. Will you forgive me—will you accept it?"

"If a man chooses to be silly, why am I to forgive him? I have nothing to forgive. But Mrs. Laird gave me my first congratulations and present."

"Do let me see it," said Basil, with boyish curiosity; "if it is prettier than mine, I'll send to London for another."

They opened the parcel between them, and discovered a small scarf of exquisite old point-lace, which looked as if an industrious spider had spent her whole life in spinning it.

"Ah!" said Lotty, "it is the prettiest, it will be. Basil, you can have nothing so lovely as this!"

"Lovely, indeed! It looks to me like very irregular old cobwebs; and it is not even washed yet."

"Ah, Basil! you are just like all gentlemen

you know nothing about women's dress. Mrs. Laird must have known I was so fond of old lace, and this will do to throw over my curls when Lady Katherine comes, as she is shocked to see me without a cap."

"For heaven's sake, no!" exclaimed Basil. "Why should you go mourning about the world, as if you had lost your first love—your husband? It is all very well for Margaret."

"Basil, I think you don't quite know what you are saying."

"I believe you are right; but don't wrap up your curls;—besides, the year is out for what people call weeds."

"Wrap up my curls!—as if they were parcels, or newspapers to be sent off! But where is your present? I am sure you are ashamed of it, and cannot show it after Mrs. Laird's."

"Mine is quite in a different style; and, besides, I have taken a great deal of trouble about it. I wanted to match something, and all over London I could find nothing in art or nature to equal them."

"Whose were they, and what are they?"

"They are two eyes, and in your possession," said Basil.

"Ah! I dare say, now, you have brought me a set of buttons made of cat's-eye pebbles. Hideous!—I won't accept them!"

"They are not cat's-eye pebbles, and they are not buttons."

"Then, they are great staring carbuncles."

"Which, you know, I suppose, would just match your eyes, little Lotty."

"Don't, Basil; I am nineteen to-day."

"Then, sweet Lotty, take my present, and, with it, more good wishes than I care to own. For Mrs. Bankes is just drawing the curtains of her bed-room window—(it seemeth to me she hath on a cap of peculiar Bankes' construction)—and she will perhaps tell tales of us at breakfast."

"Pray, why should I not walk with whom I please," said Lotty, "without asking Mrs. Bankes?"

"Bear would not be Flo., and you—"

"Bear, Bear, bite him!" But he and Bear went off together in a frolicsome mood.

Lotty opened Basil's present, with some curiosity certainly, and much pleasure that he had remembered her.

She drew forth from the pink cotton in which they were enveloped, a fairy little pair of gold manacles. As she turned them round, her eyes were quite dazzled with the splendour of a single diamond on each, beneath which was the fastening. So large, so brilliant, so perfect in shape and water, almost alone in their slight, simple setting, Lotty held them before her in wonder and admiration, and as they reflected back her own eyes, she blushed over face and neck at the remembrance of his words.

"My eyes, indeed! who could have thought that Basil would have been so foolish as to spend such a fortune as he must have done on these diamonds, just because of my eyes? Shall I make him take them back? No; I will tell him he is very silly, and I will wear them until there is a Lady Erlscourt, and then she shall have them. They will look lovely on——Ah, well! I will say nothing!"

CHAPTER VII.

It was very true that Mrs. Bankes had, unasked, unwished for, thrust herself once more into Court Leigh. She was a prey to most ungovernable curiosity, as to how matters were going on there, since the extraordinary change in all their fates; and finding that she was likely to receive no positive invitation, with an unabashed coolness, peculiar to Mrs. Bankes, she gave herself and her dear Frederick an invitation of her own accord.

Margaret was too amiable, and too well-bred, to turn her from her door, as it might be said. And though, in her gentle, grief-stricken heart, she might fancy that Mrs. Bankes showed a great want of delicate feeling

in thus thrusting her society upon one who must be painfully reminded of all that occurred on her former visit, that heart was too well schooled in adversity and sorrow to bend before a Mrs. Bankes's annoyances. So there she was settled, as she assured her dear Frederick, in conjugal talk at night, just as if she was at home. "I knew it would be the case, the moment they saw me, 'out of sight, out of mind;' moping and pining over their griefs and sorrows, naturally they would think, that no one would like to come and be with them, 'down with the dead men all day.' By which, Fred., I don't mean their husbands, but to express their being in the dumps. However, they little knew me—I am always ready to give my advice and company, where I can see they will be of real use, and I shall begin, the first thing in the morning, to look about me, and see what I can do; I shall think it is only my duty. Margaret was but a poor thing when we were here before, but positively she is a spectre now; and what caps! her face looks like nothing in them and only that line of hair. Now, my dear

Fred., if I am to be so unfortunate as to lose you, I should make a point of having a cap of the very first milliner, in style and everything; though you may suppose, Fred., that a widow's cap is nothing but a bit of muslin, you are mistaken. Some are made of lawn, with broad sorts of streamers, down each side, very ugly to look at, and always in the way. Some are made of—Why, Fred.! Fred.!—I declare he is asleep; I never saw such a fellow to sleep; I don't think he can be well, so I must dose him to-morrow; that snore sounds very bilious. However, I will go to sleep myself, now, for I have a great deal to do to-morrow, looking about me. We have got Lady Montagu's room I find. Well! it is very handsome and comfortable, and I am glad to see Margaret does not neglect her mother—some people are so selfish in their sorrow, and it is lucky the old lady had gone home for a while, as, perhaps, they would have had no room for us, and that would have been a pretty kettle of fish, after all my trouble in dragging Fred. down. That certainly is a bilious snore." However, here—

like Mrs. Caudle, of Punch memory — Mrs. Bankes fell asleep, and was undrawing her curtains, just as Basil said, on the morning of Lotty's birthday.

No one appeared at breakfast that morning without a present for Lotty, excepting Mr. and Mrs. Bankes, and apparently Lord Erlscourt. Young Harold brought a silver chain, with a plate and name on it, for Bear, who seemed more surprised than pleased with his necklace. The little Lottina toddled in with a small riding-whip of exquisite workmanship, and fairy proportions.

The two Erle boys, not thinking that money could buy ought handsome enough for Mrs. Leigh, had endeavoured to make their presents valuable from the labour bestowed thereon.

Therefore one brought her the model of a steam-engine, made by himself, at infinite wear and tear of his nerves and temper, during the process, that it might indeed prove worthy of the person on whom it was bestowed. And as he had no idea of all this trouble being

taken for nothing, he had ingeniously made his steam-engine the vehicle for holding different scents, all of which, by some extraordinary contrivance, came out of the same spout, yet remained pure and uncontaminated by each other. The other presented her with a collection of eggs of British birds, each set of eggs in its own nest, beautifully arranged and classified, and encased by himself; the collection was really both valuable and curious. Besides which, they each gave her a young Pinus deodarus, raised from seed by themselves, and which were planted that day with due honour at High Leigh, thereby costing Mrs. Laird a whole bottle of ginger wine, and an entire baking of short bread, neither of which she begrudged. Mr. and Mrs. Frank's present was jointly given—a rare and costly set of chessmen, seemingly carved solely for the long taper nails of the Empress of China.

"Ah!" sighed Lotty as she gazed on them, "I shall always lose now, when I play with these beautiful chess-men. I shall do nothing

but admire them, and wonder how they could have been so deftly carved."

The twins carried in each hand—being themselves each carried in their turn by a maid—a bunch of violets. And Margaret covered her Lotty with roses as her present, having given secret orders, months before, to have some forced on purpose: and Lotty looked like a little Queen-rose among them.

"It is all very well, Lord Erlscourt, giving presents, now and then," said Mrs. Bankes, "but I see you have made no offering: neither have I, nor dear Frederick—we do not quite approve of such things, because it leads to a sort of jealousy, you know; one does not give as handsome a present as the other. Look now at the difference between Margaret's roses, and the chessmen. Lotty had only to wait until summer, and she might smother herself in roses. But I suppose the Leigh estates are still much embarrassed: I conclude Margaret could afford no more."

"A rose, Mrs. Bankes, especially out of

season, has been valued at a much higher price than you seem to think its due."

"Ah! yes, some of those new roses; for instance, what sums were paid for Géant de Bataille."

"And don't you remember that story of 'Beauty and the Beast?' there, if I mistake not, a rose is valued at a life."

"You joke, my lord; but what is Lotty showing now? Bracelets! upon my word, those really now seem a pretty little present; very tasty and fashionable. Do let me look at them. Jupiter Ammon! my dear, what diamonds! Fred., Fred., come here; did you ever! Heavens! child, they are worth millions of money! Where did you get them? Who gave them to you?"

"I found them this morning."

"Found them, my dear! Are you sure they are for you? Had you no note?"

"Yes, they were in a parcel directed to me, and this note inside."

"Let me see! let me see!" exclaimed Flo.

TO LOTTY'S EYES.

I've sought in vain to find a gem
To match those radiant ones of thine.
Ah! Lotty, who that looks on them,
Will deign to cast one glance on mine?

'Tis as the glow-worm's feeble light
To yon bright stars that gem the skies;
Lotty, my life is as the night.
Lighten it, star-like, with thine eyes.

"Upon my word, pretty thoughts indeed. 'Tis almost as good as an offer of marriage; and I am sure only a prince of the blood could afford such a present. You are lucky! my dear."

"If the donor appears and declares that he means what he says, ought Mrs. Leigh to accept his offer?" asked Lord Erlscourt.

"Of course she ought. She may be sure he must be monstrous rich and generous," answered Mrs. Bankes.

"The donor shall know my mind when he wishes it, and I shall not have much trouble in telling him he is a very great goose for

his pains." Thus savagely growled the little Bear, with angry, sparkling eyes, and red-rose cheeks.

Mrs. Bankes' retort was smothered by the entrance of Mr. Grey, the bearer of more presents. An antique brooch from Lady Katherine, with a rare pearl in the centre, that lay conscious and blushing at its own beauty; an embroidered *sachet de mouchoirs* from Pru., the work of her own diligent fingers; and from Mr. Grey himself, some books on botany.

* * * *

When all the excitement regarding Lotty's presents had somewhat subsided, the ever-busy Florence, looking round to see in what manner she could employ herself with satisfaction, was delighted to catch sight of Mr. Grey, drawing Lady Leigh confidentially aside. Humming an indifferent sort of nothing-may-care tune, she placed herself, as by chance, sufficiently close to hear the interesting com-

munication: and we presume, could not but be edified thereby.

"I am very much obliged to you, Lady Leigh, and trust my wishes may not have proved in this instance as running counter to my better judgment."

"Dear me!" said the listener to herself.

"I am sure of the contrary, John," said Lady Leigh, "and am glad to do as you wish, if it were only to please myself."

"My good gracious! who would have thought it?" said the listener, almost aloud, in her amazement.

"They have suffered very severely through all the winter months, for want of regular employment, and really with natures like the Jones', so prone to evil, starvation might lead them to crime."

"Law! parish stuff!" said the disappointed hearer.

"I did not think it right to bind them down to any promise, but only said they should have constant work for a time; I think by this means, we shall make their condition

so very much better, that they will experience the virtue of gratitude at least; and if they work, they cannot be in mischief. But I have one thing to propose, Lady Leigh, as binding them yet more strongly to you."

"What is that, John?"

"If you would go sometimes and visit the new cottage they are to build, as if interested in its erection, and by this means get into conversation with them, I think, after a time, you might propose giving half the money they will earn weekly, to their wives."

"Bless the man!" said the listener; "does he think to make Lady Leigh entice common masons to do their duty, and to talk to them?"

"Willingly, dear John! I understand exactly what you mean," said Lady Leigh.

"Dear John! I suppose then they must be engaged; I shall go and question Lotty, when they finish."

"It seems to me likely, that if you take an interest in these unhappy men and their families, that they will experience a new and delightful feeling. They have been so long the

objects of contempt and opprobrium, kindness, or, at all events, interest in them, will awaken better feelings."

"And even supposing your good thought does not succeed, John, we shall at least know that we drove them by no unkindness to greater evil."

"True; to-morrow, I believe, I am to expect you at the school. I suppose, in rewarding the children after the examination, uniform propriety of conduct is to have greater praise than any individual quantity of learning, or assiduity. I find the little things are much more particular and amiable in their manners to each other, since you gave Amy Wilcox, that pale, meek child, the first prize for attention to her little sister, and that great dunce, Joseph Ewins, for his care of his grandmother. And they seem to know that I keep a pretty keen look-out after all their delinquencies."

"They have not to learn those long Scripture lessons by heart, now, which is a very good thing," said Lady Leigh; "I could not

bear to hear those holy words gabbled and stumbled over, like a common lesson."

"I think it has had a good effect, not doing so; they seem much more interested in the Bible now, and really try to understand it, instead of only repeating the words like empty-headed parrots."

"Do you think that poor girl will recover, down at Burnleigh?"

"A great and horrible weight seems taken off her mind. Her parents naturally were very much shocked and disgusted, that a daughter of theirs should have thus disgraced herself; and I by no means wish them to think or act otherwise. Her sin is far too common and uncared-for, in this country, for us to deal otherwise than strongly by it. Nevertheless, under the heavy displeasure of her parents, the unfeeling conduct of her sister, whatever promptings of remorse and contrition she had, were being smothered. Miss Rachel luckily found the way into that sin-laden heart, and once removed from home and country,

with the power to retrieve her good name, we may hope to 'save this soul alive.'"

"Such a hope is worth any trial. God bestows on us daily opportunities of repentance and amendment. It is fit we do the same by our erring fellow-mortals," answered the gentle Margaret.

And now there flushed over John Grey's face a glow so peculiar and satisfactory, that Flo. became more intent than ever.

"My happy day is fixed," said he.

"Yes," answered Margaret, half smiling, half murmuring, "Easter-Tuesday, dear John; you will now be identified with us, both in weal and woe."

"I must have been so without this happiness. Believe me, owing this blessing as I do, solely to you, for your sacred command, 'Be my mother's son,' pointed out that my inclination was scarcely more strong than my duty, the home, the world, the love, — the welfare of the Leighs, must ever have been mine."

"My goodness me! where is Lotty?" and

Mrs. Bankes, in her hurry to find her, left the rest of this interesting conversation to be heard only by the ears intended for it.

"Lotty, Lotty! what is this I hear?"

"I do not know, Flo., as you may have heard what I have not."

"Oh! you may look as demure as you like," continued Mrs. Bankes, winking violently. "None so deaf as those who won't hear."

"Not having heard yet, I presume you have no reference to me," answered Lotty.

"Then, my dear, since you are so discreet, allow me to ask how long Mr. Grey has been such a prodigious favourite here?"

"Ever since he came, Flo."

"Dear me! well, I must say, I should not have thought it. Margaret seemed to me, as if she would have been constant for two years at least. Now with you, my dear Lotty, if you had married the next month, I should have thought it no more than your duty."

"What a pity it is, I can get no one to have me."

"Oh, but you may, my dear—don't despair;

and you with such a good jointure, too. There is a cousin of mine—"

"What! the red-haired one—no, I thank you; I'll endure my lonely state as well as I can, rather than that."

"Well, my dear, that is according to taste. Everybody says he is very like Fred.; and when one comes to think what you endured from that dark, gloomy man—ah! my dear, they say such things of him—"

"Then they who say, seem indifferent to truth."

"Come, Lotty, don't be angry with your old school-fellow and friend. I know he behaved very ill to you; come, now tell me all about it."

"You seem better informed than I am."

"Then, my dear, I'll just tell you all I heard, and you will be able to assure me if it's true."

"You had better make no remarks upon Philip Leigh before Bear, unless they are strictly true. Come here, Bear; what do you do when people tell fibs?"

Bear made such an exhibition of frantic rage, that Mrs. Bankes fled in a panic—all unwotting that Lotty and Bear had peculiar modes of communication, not necessarily dependent on the vulgar tongue.

* * * *

The banquet, as Mrs. Laird persisted in calling it, was superb. Margaret did not appear in such large parties at the head of her table, but was seated at the side, by her dear Lotty. Lady Katherine presided, with John Grey as vice-president. The gentle Pru. was undergoing a course of teazing from the Erle boys, on the subject of love and lovers, and she must not eat that, nor partake of the other, or touch anything inflammable, which amused Mrs. Bankes greatly ; and she said to herself, "Poor old thing ! I should not wonder but she thinks them in earnest."

John, however, guarded his Pru. so well, she became quite merry and lively, with all their fun.

So Mrs. Bankes again said to herself:—

"Bless the old thing! she will be thinking that man in love with her."

The children appeared with the fruit, before the ladies had retired. The beautiful young Harold drew towards his mother, with all his loving heart in his eyes; while the little rosy, blooming Lottina, made such a noise on her godmother's knee, they were very nearly both being sent to bed. The little, quiet twins looked on with awe and wonder at this noise; their fair little faces, and upright stiff, little figures, making them appear as miniatures of Pru. and Pro. But Mr. Frank lost himself in a sea of admiration at their loveliness; and all the Beauvillians declared, though they were unlike "the girl," the original girl, they were quite gems of girls.

After dinner, Mrs. Bankes having been conjecturing half the time how an ordinary sort of man, whose wig got pushed all on one side from excitement, had been admitted, together with his wife, who spoke the broadest, vulgarest Scotch, and was always speaking too,

seated herself beside the offending person, to find out what she could about her.

"That is a very handsome dress, ma'am," began Mrs. Bankes.

"Yer welcome to admire it, Mistress Bankes," said Mrs. Laird, getting all her armour ready. She had seen quite enough of Mrs. Bankes at dinner, to determine how to act.

"So you know me. I am not so fortunate as to surmise who you are."

"I am Mistress Laird, the doctor's wife, and we live at High Leigh; and I was born a Macullam; and I bought my dress in Glasgaw; and the price of it, and the length on it, is down i' the bill."

"Really, Mrs. Laird, you must not suppose that I am of a prying, meddling disposition; no one was ever so free from such vices."

"Mistress Bankes, I am glad to hear it," responded Mrs. Laird.

"I hope you will allow me to admire your cap, without thinking I wish to know all the particulars thereof."

Not that Mrs. Bankes really admired either

cap or dress, for the latter was of a striking tartan, and, being satin in texture, shone out with unblushing glory; while the lace cap might have been pretty, had it not been favoured with bows of a peculiar make, size, and colour, that gave Mrs. Laird's marked Scotch features the appearance of being newly done up to sit for a sign-board of blessed Queen Anne. But she thought admiration a notable way of learning a person's weak points.

"I hae no objection, ma'am, to tell ye that the cap was a present from one o' Mrs. Leigh's uncles, so I am no like to ken the price."

"But how did you know him?"

"Ay, that's it; that maks a' the differ, as the doctor says, when a patient's mending or worsing."

"Oh! there is a mystery about it, is there?"

"May be there is, and may be there isn't."

"Are you the lady who was kind to Mrs. Leigh, when her brute of a husband behaved so ill to her?"

"The Lord save us!—and is that the way to speak o' a puir dead mon, who ne'er hurted

ye? Eh, Mrs. Banks! div ye no fear a curse on ye?"

"I am not at all superstitious, I can assure you. I always speak of people as I find them."

"Then, if you was to the fore, there's nae need for me to tell ma news."

"But if you have any news, I shall be very glad to hear it, for I am so much interested about dear little Lotty, that, though I never make or meddle in other people's matters, it is a point with me to enter into all her concerns."

"Very ceevil, I am sure. Ye hae nae family o' yer own, may be?"

"No; but why ask that?"

"When a body has naething to entertain them at hame, they are aye rinning after ither folks' matters. I find it mysel'; but then, ye see, I hae a fine, sensible mon to ma husband, and your little mon, he seems aye very sweet o' the platter and jug; but I am misdoubting ye are his master."

Pocketing the insult to her dear Fred., on account of the implied compliment to her own

sense, Mrs. Bankes got interested in a further debate.

"And about Philip Leigh?"

"What aboun a dead man?"

"I have heard it said that he behaved very ill indeed to his wife."

"Ech me, what one hears noo a-days!"

"Then it's not true?"

"Hae ye axed Mrs. Leigh?"

"Yes, I have; but she won't say anything."

"And she wunna tell ye naething?"

"No, not a word, though I am dying of curiosity, and shall be most thankful to you if you will give me every information in your power."

"What for, Mistress Bankes?"

"Oh! for no particular reason. I shall, of course, tell no one, but, having my own suspicions, I shall be delighted to find I was correct."

"And what do ye ca' unkind?"

"Why, scolding, rowing her. I have heard he beat her, and gambled away his money, and all sorts of things."

"Weel, Mistress Bankes, they lived at our house ganging on for sax weeks, and during a' that time he never said a cross word till her; but he loved the air she stood in, the chair she sat in, the cup she touched, and he died in her arms at last, saying he was happy to gang that way."

"Dear, how odd! I concluded it was so different. But here are the gentlemen. Are you not shocked, Mrs. Laird, to see how dreadfully Lady Leigh flirts with Mr. Grey?"

"What div ye think 'ill come on it?"

"I suppose she'll marry him; and her husband, that she idolized so, hardly dead a year."

"I hae reason to think she wunna."

"Why, why, my dear Mrs. Laird? have you seen or heard anything?"

"Ay; I hae seen him walking with Miss Leigh, and I hae heard Lady Katherine give them the blessing as man and wife."

"Oh, nonsense! I'll never believe it! You are mistaken! You don't know what I overheard this morning. Lady Leigh called him 'dear John'—'dearest John:' she spoke about

a cottage—and what was that but love in a cottage?"

"Weel, weel; hae it yer ain way. May be ye'll lend me yer little mon to run awa' wi' next. Never fear, but ye shall hae him back, wrapped in a cambric handkercher."

Mrs. Bankes left Mrs. Laird's side, with an uncomfortable feeling that she had not had the last word.

"Very strange woman that, my dear Lotty. I am surprised Margaret asked her to meet such company."

"Margaret did not ask her—I did."

"I don't think, then, my dear, you acted with the judgment I really thought you possessed, under all your childish ways. Besides being very much out of place in her *outré* dress and cap, she talks such broad Scotch, and has no idea of right and wrong. I convicted her in such a fib—"

"A fib!" said Lotty.

"Yes, my dear. She told me just as coolly as if I was a bit of cucumber and she the vinegar, that Mr. Grey was going to be mar-

ried to Miss Leigh. God bless the man that gets her! say I, for she is the most regular old maid I ever saw. Little did Mrs. Laird know what I overheard this morning between Mr. Grey and Margaret. Quite by accident, I heard them settling their plans, and she called him 'my John.' I must say I never would have believed it of Margaret—never!"

"I don't see why you need believe it now, Flo"

"Ah, my dear, you are an innocent, well-meaning girl, and without saying much, I dare say you feel a great deal. And I am certain you would never pay your husband so bad a compliment as to be ready to jump down the throat of the first man that offered."

"I should say it was a compliment to my first husband, Flo., and showed I was anxious to be as happy again as he made me."

"Pooh, child! you must not joke on such serious subjects. You are under my care and advice, and well it is for you that you are; for with this frightful example of Margaret's before you, with all her ridiculous show—here

are the gentlemen, my dear Lotty, so no more. My gracious! how red Fred. is in the face—I hope he has not been taking too much wine. How handsome Lord Erlscourt is!—really—I suppose that's what makes Fred. look rather, that is, not quite so handsome as usual. What a beautiful smile he has; ah, my dear! if Margaret had now only fallen in love with him, instead of that humdrum clergyman, we must have made allowances for her. He bends over her chair so gracefully."

"The humdrum—"

"No, you stupid thing! and she has quite brightened up with some lively remark he has made. Ah! Margaret, too late, you'll discover what a goose you have been. I see such a distressing state of things for the future,"

"'Let not ills that never hap, chiefly make thee wretched,' saith Tupper, Flo."

"My dear, nonsense with your Tupper! I never make nor—Ah! here is Lord Erlscourt looking my way; yes, he is coming towards us; so, Lotty, dear, if you have anything to say to

any one, pray don't think it necessary to remain and entertain me."

"I can assure you, Flo., the entertainment is all on the other side."

"Well, people do say I am the most agreeable woman they ever met, and I am sure I don't know why it is so, for I never entertain company at other people's expense—but go, my dear, here he is."

Mrs. Bankes was thinking so much of how she should bring to bear the full battery of all her agreeable powers upon Lord Erlscourt, that she did not perceive his look of disappointment at Lotty's retreat. How he shook his head deprecatingly at her, and how Lotty laughed back a laugh of spiteful amusement, at his being caught in the clutches of Mrs. Bankes. Determining to cut it as short as possible, he set himself to submit with as good a grace as he could.

"Well, my Lord, I am so delighted you have come, because I feel a little out of place here, and you being in the same situation, we can comfort each other."

"I feel remarkably happy, thank you, Mrs. Bankes, and do not feel at all as if I was in the way."

"Of course, my Lord, I don't mean in the way; but they are all so nearly related and connected with each other, that we seem the only two strangers."

"I could not have supposed a person so amiable as Mrs. Bankes, had forgotten the existence of Mr. Bankes."

"Oh! of course I included Fred.; but you see there is that Mr. Grey, going to become one of the family."

"True."

"Oh! then you have been told, otherwise I was going to mention to you a little circumstance I heard this morning, quite by accident. They were talking in the window, and she called him her beloved John, and they talked about settlements."

"They seem to have had an eye to business as well as love, Mrs. Bankes."

"Ah! yes, that is generally the case with widows."

"Widows!" exclaimed Lord Erlscourt.

"Yes, of course, are we not talking of Lady Leigh and Mr. Grey?"

"Oh! we are, are we? have you congratulated her yet? I think she would only consider it kind of an old schoolfellow; and if you will excuse me while you perform this friendly matter, I wish to tell Mrs. Leigh that I think Dr. Laird must have given her those bracelets."

"I dare say he did, and they are nothing but Scotch diamonds after all."

"Paste, I should say, Mrs. Bankes."

"No doubt, just like a doctor's taste."

"Basil, where have you sent Mrs. Bankes?" said Lotty, as he passed on to her.

"I know where I should like to send her," said Basil; "but at present I have despatched her to congratulate Margaret upon her intended nuptials with Mr. Grey."

"Oh, Basil; how could you be so mischievous!"

"Not at all; Margaret's answer will rebuke her more than anything we can say. Ha! little Lotty, look, she has begun; see Mar-

garet's face, first astonishment, then calm, dignified contempt. With what Queen-like grace she rises and touches John Grey's arm. I will stake the next kiss you give me, that—"

"Don't stake what you have not, Basil."

"That Margaret has not answered her a word, but has taken John Grey up to introduce him, and said, 'Mrs. Bankes wishes to offer you her congratulations on your intended marriage with Miss Leigh.' Don't you perceive how mortified she looks, little Lotty?

"Don't you think Lord Erlscourt is very rude to me, Mrs. Laird?" said Lotty, falling back to the shelter of the brilliant plaid satin dress.

"To luik at his een, my bairn, I see pratty much what a' on us feel, and that's nae rudeness."

"Quite true, Mrs. Laird; I never can persuade Lotty that it is all love on my part," said Lord Erlscourt.

Mrs. Laird turned upon him the full battery of her shrewd Scotch eyes; then, as if the scrutiny was satisfactory, she placed her

hand fondly on Lotty, saying, "May ye niver hae mair rudeness than my laird's, my bairn."

"If you take his side, I leave you," answered Lotty, crossing over to Rachel Clare.

"Weel, my laird, I am thinking, like us a', yer aye fond of that bonny bairn."

"'Fond' is not quite the proper expression for me, Mrs. Laird. Some of these days I'll prove my real opinion of her. But, alas! Mrs. Bankes seems returning."

"Ech! my word, what a daft body thon is."

"You and my brothers agree."

"Aye, but I am glad I'm in sich coompany. Them's twa grand boys, and I'll gang and hae a clack wi' em, about yon fulish body, just to ease my mind."

"May I come some morning, and sit with you? Believe me actuated by no unworthy motive, if I question you about poor Philip Leigh."

"Deed wunnot I. The doctor and me will be aye glad to let on till a friend abune him, and a' that little angel thing suffered. For

she wull never tell, and naebody kens a' I kens about the bonny thing. She's joost made of the Almighty's best handy-work. But here's thon daft body."

"My lord, how could you—" began Mrs. Bankes.

"I beg your pardon—pray excuse me—Lady Leigh calls me," answered Basil, hastily departing.

"Mrs. Laird, you ought to be ashamed of yourself, to deceive me thus," said Flo. to her.

"My guid woman, shame and Janet Laird never sat together yet. Tak yer ain blame on yer ain head, or may be's I'll get my doctor to gie ye his mind."

"Good woman, indeed!"

"Hey! maybe I mistook there;" and Mrs. Laird moved off, grimly smiling at her own wit.

CHAPTER VIII.

"I WISH, Basil," said Lotty, as she met him, when returning on the morrow from her morning's walk, "you would take back those diamonds; they ought to be heirlooms, or something of that sort."

"So I mean them to be," said Basil; "but don't plume yourself upon thinking they are diamonds—Mrs. Bankes says they are paste."

"She is very angry with me about John Grey, and said I wilfully deceived her, Basil; and that you also are a victim to my mischievous temper."

"I am a victim to you, Lotty, but not in that way."

"I am not in any humour for nonsense,

Basil, so pray talk common sense. One would suppose you were one of the boys. And how happens it, that you have taken such a restless turn? I never knew you take these early walks before."

"That shows how little you are interested in my movements — for I always take early walks; but lately you seem continually to have stumbled on my path."

"Why do you not ask the servants which road I take?"

"So I do, Lotty."

"Then, Basil, you follow me on purpose."

"Without any doubt, Lotty. Do you dislike my company?"

"No, not at all; but you should be Basil, not a——"

"Not a fool, Lotty."

"I did not say so; but, come now, will you take those bracelets back?"

"No, certainly not."

"Then I will wear them on one condition, that when there is a young Lady Erlscourt, I may present them to her."

"That depends upon what sort of arm she has. She may weigh twenty stone, Lotty."

"That you may be certain she will not do, Basil; but why did you have them made so small?"

"To fit this tiny wrist," answered Basil, taking her hand in his.

"It is very easy to have more links added, if she should weigh twenty stone," said Lotty, withdrawing it.

"I agree with you, that she will not weigh so much—more likely twenty pounds; so I close with your proposal."

"Thank you, Basil; now I shall wear them in peace and comfort, just as if they were my own."

"Long may you continue to think they are your own, little Lotty."

"Nay, Basil, not so. I do not know of any one who ought to have a perfect wife so much as you."

"I quite agree, Lotty. But will a perfect wife, such as I want, have me?"

"Ah, Basil, you are, indeed, very strange;

knowing as you must know, what I know, how can you be so ambiguous and foolish?"

"Ah, Bear, come here, and resolve me of this sentence; 'knowing as you must know what I know,' and I asked a straightforward question, Bear; who is most ambiguous, old fellow?"

"Then, Basil, Margaret. Does she not look almost like her old self? Now that poor Harold's name is cleared, thanks to your exertions, she seems to have given him calmly up to God, and is only bent on fulfilling his earthly duties."

"Lotty, Margaret has realised every hope I had entertained of her character. And, perhaps, had she not had these trials, we should not have seen the full beauty and strength of it. She has risen superior to even the idol that I had formed of her in my heart, when I loved her so madly."

"Loved her, Basil! Do you not love her now?"

"Yes, as the angels love, Lotty."

"Wherefore thus, Basil? Are not her

trials over? Will you not guard her future life? Will you not make amends to her for all she has endured?"

"Yes, Lotty, as a brother."

"No more, Basil?"

"No, Lotty, I cannot."

"Then farewell to my last scheme of match-making. Yet, why is it so, Basil? she is more worthy of your love than before."

"Granted, Lotty, doubly granted. But we men, calling ourselves your superiors in all things, must bow the knee before the true and constant affection of a woman's heart. I am faithless; I almost think I love another."

"Then I shall hate that other, Basil."

"Hate her as much as you please, sweet Lotty, provided she makes me happy."

"You are selfish, Basil. Like Flo., I will neither make nor meddle in your matters."

"Nay, Lotty, grant me your best wishes, at all events; for the heart I wish to win, is so pure, so true, so noble, that did it not love me with all its powers, I know I should be rejected on the spot."

"Then take my best wishes, since she seems so worthy of you; but, for goodness sake! let me hear no more of the matter."

"Lotty, do not be angry. Come, we will talk of something else. I like your Mrs. Laird very much. She told me long stories about you."

"She might have employed her time better."

"Lotty, you must have suffered much."

"I suffer nothing now."

"When I loved you so, Lotty, as the fearless, warm-hearted child, I did not think you were something much beyond; a lesson to us all, an example in every way."

"Good-bye!" said Lotty; "you take me for a baby, still, I see."

She ran away; and Basil went to join his brothers, who were at a little distance, practising jumping over a leaping-bar.

"We would not come and disturb you, Basil, because you were walking with Mrs. Leigh," said Brian.

"And why did that prevent you? I thought she was such a favourite of yours."

"So she is," said both the boys; "but as we said to each other, when we saw you, if we walked alone with Mrs. Leigh, we should certainly tell her how much we loved her, so we thought you could not help doing so also."

"You are quite right; I did."

"And what did she say? Oh! Basil, did she say she would marry you, be our sister? I'll kiss her every day then."

"Stop, stop, boys; not so fast. I may not allow that."

"Once a week then, dear Basil."

"Well, perhaps once a week I may; but there is one great impediment. She would not hear me—she ran away, as you saw just now."

The two boys groaned. And all breakfast-time they sat sorrowful and silent, and ate very little, which was not at all their usual custom. And every now and then, they heaved deep sighs, like the sighs of an ancient steam-engine, tugging a long coal-train.

In vain Mrs. Bankes cheered them up, in her usual rather vulgar style, by affectionate

slaps on the back, and incessant friendly winks; they remained plunged in deep sorrow, and never looked at Lotty without further sighs. So Mrs. Bankes began to foresee various strange things, and opened her eyes accordingly. Before breakfast was finished, she had come to the conclusion that both the Erle boys, not being so much younger than Lotty, were deeply in love with her, and that they would probably have a deadly quarrel; and that Lord Erlscourt was making up to Lady Leigh himself. He had put two pats of butter on her plate unknowingly, and twice slipped out the word "Margaret." She would take the earliest opportunity of informing Lotty of this state of affairs.

CHAPTER IX.

"So, Lotty, I see which way the wind lies; you and Margaret will be sisters after all," said Mrs. Bankes.

"You are very kind to manage it so, Flo."

"Not at all; I live for nothing so much as to oblige my friends. Unlike Carry—By-the-bye, have you seen her lately?"

"Yes, last summer."

"Then, my dear, you know she has two more babies, each paler and more frightful than the first; and if I thought her baby-mad before, she now ought to be made principal nurse to an infant school. Upon my word, I never see her without thinking of a basin of pap."

"She used to be very pretty."

"Pretty! yes; but such a slattern. She thinks of nothing but those children; and would you believe it, Mr. Royston made her a present of a grey moiré, (she really went about not fit to be seen), and she exchanged it, my dear, for three little drab-coloured pelisses, embroidered in sky-blue silk. And you may think, with her weak, wobbling babies, what they were like, in a week. Such a love of a grey! silver grey. I helped to choose it; ten shillings and sixpence a yard, my dear."

"I suppose she has a right to do as she pleases."

"Not at all, Lotty; that is a very mistaken notion of yours. People should always remember their friends, under any circumstances. It is quite a point with me to do so; and that is why I interest myself so much about you. Now mark my words, and be careful of those Erle boys. One is a boy no longer, and he will be getting your name compromised. Widows should be so particular, twice as much

so as single women, and that is why I wish you to warn Margaret. It really is not right having Lord Erlscourt always in her house, and consulting him on every occasion."

"Oh! now you think she is going to marry him; last night it was Mr. Grey."

"I can never forgive you, Lotty, about that. I shall never forget Lord Erlscourt's look when I first told him; really, the muscles about his mouth quivered and shook, until I thought he would go and knock Mr. Grey down. No wonder, poor man! now I see which way the wind blows. By-the-bye, what unlucky person was it, who hooked that poor Mr. Grey in, (really he is a very nice, agreeable man; Fred. says sensible enough, though a little too religious for him), to marry that poor old thing?"

"Did no one tell you, Flo., it was an old affair, begun ten years ago?"

"Law! so that's it. Well, to return to Margaret; of course she will not be such a fool as to refuse Lord Erlscourt."

"I never asked her, and I don't suppose he has," said Lotty.

"Well, my dear, he is going to; of that I am positive. He gave her three pats of butter, one after another, and called her his dearest Margaret!"

"Great symptoms, Flo."

"Pooh, child! you will never get older or wiser, as long as you live, such pains as I take with you too. But remember my advice in this instance; don't associate too much with that old Scotchwoman—she will be doing you a mischief some day, with her gossiping tongue."

"Much obliged, mem; I'll aye trust that ye will be to the fore, to help the young leddy out on it."

"Dear me! I had no idea you were so near. However, I never say anything of which I am ashamed, so I cannot apologize."

"Deed, mem, for a' Janet Laird cares, ye may keep your apologees to yoursel. I wad think ill o' mysel if ye could say aught to fret

me. Gang yer ways, guid body, the world is wide enow for us twa, wi out me fashing mysel' to rub agin you."

"Vulgar old woman!" muttered Mrs. Bankes, walking off.

"My bairn, I am wanting your company on a bit business o' Mr. Grey's. There is a misguided set o' young things doon i' them cottages by the burn, and he thinks if we wad just luik after them a bit, they might get righted. We are no to flite 'em with owre much guid talk, which, aye me, for weak human nature, gaes a puir misguided body sit up their prood backs; but when we hae gettin' round 'em, we maun then tell him. They are yure hooses, my bairn, and they aye think a deal of the little fairy mistress. The Lord forgie us! thinking so mickle on ye, bairn."

"The Lord forgive me, if I do not prove both grateful and deserving," answered Lotty, gravely. "But I am ready."

"Aye, my bairn," continued Mrs. Laird, as they pursued their way. "When I think o'

the first time I catched a glint o' your little child face, I could a'most beat myself for thinking of what I thought; and says the doctor to me, 'I always kenned she was something abuve the common.' Aye, but thon's a man, that my Lord."

"He does not think himself a woman, I dare say, Mrs. Laird."

"Hoot, bairn! de ye ken he has asked the doctor and me to visit him, when ye are a' wi my Leddy Montagu?"

"I am very glad of it," said Lotty.

"And he is no married, bairn!"

"No, not yet, Mrs. Laird; but I hope he will soon."

"And who to, child?"

"Why, you are Mrs. Bankes over again. I shall gratify no such curiosity, except to tell you, once he was very much in love, and upon the lady's marrying, he almost died of grief. But she is not married now, her husband is dead."

"And you think he will marry her, my bairn?"

"I hope so," said Lotty, as she switched off the head of a great thistle with a little stick.

"Bairn, ye dinna look pleased."

"I think I am in a bad humour somehow, Mrs. Laird. I think Mrs. Bankes teazes me."

"Aye, a body like that is aye a lighted candle stuck in a barrel of poodre; I'll hae to gie her my mind afore she leaves; I canna, as Mr. Grey says, laugh an ill word aff. So, my Laird's ganging this summer aff to Holland, is he?"

"Yes, we have heard some more particulars about the ship, and he does not think Lady Leigh will be quite happy, until he has seen the wreck himself—at least, what is left of her."

"A feckless errand, my bairn, but I wad na be the person to deny my Leddy Leigh aught she asked. I wad think I was hindering ane of the Lord's chosen. And wi' a' her saintly luiks, the doctor tells me she is aye the best hand at business, he ever lighted on; and a' tell the same thing. She has getten the estates most righted, they tell me."

"Yes, and of late a large sum has been paid into the bank from Australia; and it is supposed Mr. Price, the agent, that went off with so much money, has repented, and returned some to her, or else he has made his fortune at the gold diggings, and has become an honest man."

"Well, I wish him weel on wi' repentance and amendment. So noo, bairn, here is the house, and ye maun just pit on yer bit sweetest ways, to beguile they puir bodies to their guid."

* * * *

"My dear Lotty!" said Mrs. Bankes, meeting her on her return home—"what do you think?"

Mrs. Bankes's eager, excited, worldly face, did not look to advantage by that of Lotty; for an elevated feeling made her eyes shine with the holy light of a pure star. She had not laboured in vain on the errand she had been with Mrs. Laird. And the touching homage that the rough, wild people of the

hamlet had paid her innocent youth and beauty, and gentle words, had greatly affected her. She was deep in thought, as to the cause that made some natures so repel the good that waited but to find a way into their hearts; while others seemed to cull pure and holy lessons from even the depth of misery and degradation into which they had fallen.

She was thinking over one speech that had been said to her: "I would like to please Mr. Grey, if I could, he is so heartsome." And she had returned for answer: "Mr. Grey seems to wish that everybody should be as happy as himself."

"Aye, deed, does he," answered the man. "And I'd like to know his way, weel; he is a kindly body, and shakes hands as if one was just of his own sort. But I don't know how I'll ever look i' the face of mankind with such like clear eyes."

"He loves the good God for giving him so many blessings, for so fair a world to live in, so many opportunities of doing good," answered Lotty.

"I am bound to say, he does na try it oure strong upon us. I am weary o' hearing I'm sich a lost sinner. I'd like to hear how I can get oot of this pit o' wickedness, into which I never pit myself."

"Mr. Grey told us that last Sunday in church, and promised to go on with it next Sunday."

"Then I think I'll be going there; I wish to oblige him, he is heartsome and civil like."

"Very well," said Lotty. "Come; and as I go into church, I shall just look to see if you are there, and give you a nod."

"I'll take it very kind of ye, madam, for I'll feel myself a stranger, no doubt."

So Lotty was pondering over the rights and the wrongs of beguiling this man to church, through the instrumentality of liking for a fellow-mortal rather than a purer motive, love for God; and having happily settled in her own mind that it was a good thing to have got him to promise to come to church at all, her face was full of pure, happy feelings, when she met Mrs. Bankes with hers full of life's bustle.

"I think it is rather chilly this evening, Flo.," said Lotty, in answer to her question.

"Nonsense! child; he has proposed, actually and absolutely proposed this afternoon, and been accepted."

For a moment a quick, glowing blush crimsoned Lotty's face, and as it died away, left her apparently, from the contrast, perfectly pale: but she answered without a shade of difference in her voice, without even a tone of astonishment—

"You are speaking of Lord Erlscourt and Lady Leigh."

"Yes, my dear, they little knew that I was hidden behind the curtain, and saw the whole scene: and he kissed her hand! Oh! my dear, with such fervency, it was quite touching, and I could not help longing to see Fred. in just the same graceful attitude."

"Are you sure you have made no mistake, Flo.?"

"Me! my dear; me make a mistake! no I thank you. I am very grateful to the Almighty for my full share of wits, and per-

haps a little over. I don't mean to say I overheard every word, because that would have been very dishonourable on my part—in fact, such an act would have been quite beneath me; but when Margaret clasped her hands with delight, and leant upon my lord's shoulder with her handkerchief to her eyes, what could I think of that, my dear?"

"That was a very natural action, if Basil had been doing what he often has done, acting a brother's part by her, and promising her his help in something she may have set her heart on."

"Pooh, pooh! my dear! don't chatter on in that foolish way. I heard—I could not help it—I heard her say, quite loud, in consequence of her energetic feelings,—'Ah! Basil, I wanted but this to make my future life happy; I shall then see the world and all around me in a very different light to what I have done for the last eighteen months.' And then, my dear, her voice dropped, he kissed her hand, and it was, without exception, the most moving scene I ever witnessed. I slipped away

through the open study door, and have been running in every direction in search of you. Now really, Margaret has proved herself worthy of the fond interest I have ever shown her, and I hope, poor thing! my lord will make amends to her for the sad life she led with that rude bear, Sir Harold. But now, my dear Lotty, that is not the half of what I have to say to you; of course you will be turned out of your snug quarters here, and as you cannot return to your own home with those vulgar Scotch people in it, I have thought of a capital scheme. You shall come and live with Fred. and me; Fred. is very fond of you, and you would with us, my dear, have cheerful and congenial society, and not always living down with the dead men as they do here; and I will make a point of introducing you everywhere, and with your pretty, youthful style of beauty, and your peculiar dress, and doubling the real amount of your jointure, I make no doubt you will make a capital match, somehow."

"To which I shall certainly forbid the banns, Mrs. Bankes," said Lord Erlscourt.

"Oh, law! my lord, how you do startle one. What on earth sent you here?"

"I came in search of the same person as you did, therefore no wonder we met."

"I hope, my lord, you overheard nothing."

"I heard quite sufficient for me to tell you, Mrs. Bankes, that take the whole population, including Mr. Bankes, double them all, extract from each every good they possess, and bestow it upon one man, still, in my eyes, he would not be worthy of Mrs Leigh."

"I quite agree with you, my lord; Lotty has always been a great favourite of mine."

"Good-bye to you both," exclaimed Lotty; "if you have no better subject for your conversation than my unworthy self, excuse my remaining."

Lotty and Bear departed together.

"May I ask, Mrs. Bankes, what you have been telling Mrs. Leigh, in addition to the charming scheme for her future fate?"

"Nothing, I assure you; nothing at all."

"What!" continued Basil, smiling; "nothing to tell, after being behind a curtain? No,

no, Mrs. Bankes, I have not so poor an opinion of you."

"Indeed, my lord; on my honour, I made my escape as soon as ever I discovered what a very private conversation I was overhearing."

"But you heard enough to inform Mrs. Leigh of an important fact—"

"Why, yes, you know, how could I mistake, my lord—"

"That I offered my hand to Lady Leigh, and she accepted?"

"Allow me to be the first to congratulate you, my lord. I always thought Margaret much more suited to you than Sir Harold. Lucky woman as she is, to have got rid of him so easily."

"Judging of her by yourself, I presume. Poor Mr. Bankes! But pray excuse me, you have omitted such a very important part of the news to Mrs. Leigh, I must overtake her, for the purpose of imparting it."

"Oh! pray tell me first, my lord, I will be sure to tell Lotty—Ah, well! he is gone. Certainly, he is the handsomest man; if I had

seen him before Fred, now there's no saying. —However, that is neither here nor there. I wonder what made him laugh so, as he went away! I doubt he is satirical; if so, poor Margaret is in for it again. A satirical husband always ends in sneering at his wife. I should like to see Fred. indulging in so much as a smile at my expense! Well, so really this affair is settled, and I have no one with whom to talk the matter over. I am disgusted with Margaret, I must allow, making such a fuss about her first husband, and only waiting a month or two over the year to accept another with gratitude, if you please. But this is a brilliant plan of mine about Lotty. She is sure to pay handsomely for her board, and is really a very striking-looking person, though she is so little; and I don't tell her of it, because she may grow conceited. Her money will help Fred. and me well over the midsummer bills; and I shall become quite the fashion, with such a pretty, rich widow in my house."

CHAPTER X.

Flo. pursued the tenor of these thoughts to a length that would be tedious to the reader; and in discoursing them over with Fred., she was very nearly late for dinner. But others were later still. Though the last bell had rung, no Lotty was to be seen, and Lord Erlscourt was pacing up and down the room, in a manner by no means common to him.

"Have you seen Mrs. Leigh?" he asked eagerly of Mrs. Bankes, as she entered the room, hanging elegantly, as she termed it, on dear Fred.'s arm.

Though she simply answered "No," her thoughts had time to wonder what Margaret

must think, to see her intended putting himself into such a fuss all for another woman—

"Dinner is served my lady," pompously announced the butler; startling all Flo.'s thoughts off to nowhere, by the sonorousness of his mode of imparting such interesting news.

"We must wait," said Lady Leigh. "Mrs. Leigh has not returned home."

"She has dined, my lady, and desired me to inform you, she would be with you at tea."

With marked vexation, Lord Erlscourt gave his arm to Mrs. Bankes, who forgave him his decided want of good taste, because of the peculiar circumstances of his case. On no account could they have arranged it, for her to go into dinner on the arm of Fred.—that would have been so glaring before the servants. Otherwise, she enjoyed very much having Lord Erlscourt all to herself; and took every opportunity of breaking into any conversation between him and Margaret, because she felt it no more than her duty, if it were even for but one day, to prevent the servants guessing the real state of things. If Margaret had

shewn a want of feeling and delicacy, it was the more imperative she should be particular. Therefore she became at last quite confidential; whispering all sorts of things into his ear, about Lotty, and where she could be gone—perhaps to High Leigh, to tell the news—until Fred.'s light hair began to stand on end with amazement. And if Lord Erlscourt had not answered all the whispers in a loud, anti-confidential tone, with a countenance and manner to match, it might have so occurred that Fred. would have succumbed to a fit of jealousy.

Lotty was in the tea-room when they left the dining-room, and had nothing to say in excuse for her absence, but that she fancied she would like a long walk, and Bear fancied the same thing.

She was very silent all the evening; no ready answers for Mrs. Bankes. Even Margaret said, "Are you tired, my Lotty?"

"You know I am never tired," muttered Lotty.

"Let us have some music, Florence?" asked

Margaret; which request was often a gentle ruse on Lady Leigh's part, to employ the ever-active Mrs. Bankes in something harmless.

Basil took the opportunity of her being so engaged to write a little note, and fastening it in Bear's collar, he whispered to him to whom to convey it. After much coquetry on Bear's part, Lotty obtained the note. It only said—

"May I walk with you in the morning?

"Basil."

"Go and say yes, Bear," answered Lotty, tossing the note into the fire.

Basil recovered his good-humour, and found himself under the influence thereof, praising Mrs. Bankes' dashing, crashing, rattling mode of scrambling over the keys of the piano, intending people to believe she was performing "La Source," in the most approved style.

At night, when Lotty went up stairs, she sat for some time after undressing, thinking in her chair, instead of retiring to her couch. Bear sat opposite to her, winking and blinking his eyes all to no purpose, at this strange pro-

ceeding. At last he elevated a paw, and tapped her inquiringly on the arm.

"So, Bear, you wonder what is the matter with Lotty? She is not tired, no, no; but somehow her heart is weary. Well, what do you wish to say? Do you think it was all true that Flo. said? No, you don't. You turn away your head. Neither do I, Bear, we know our Margaret better; and Basil is too thoughtful, too considerate, to ask now. Besides—besides, what did he mean, by what he said this morning? Oh! you know, do you? you are pleased, and yet you know, you foolish Bear, it must not be so. Do you not see that Lotty is not Lotty this evening?—she is weak and foolish. Tell Lotty to recollect her duty, to call up all her resolution; for to-morrow, Bear, to-morrow morning, you and she will require all the fortitude, all the decision, all the determination, that ever you used before in your whole lives, concentrated in one short half-hour. We have borne many things together, Bear, and this last trial, this one other duty, is for Margaret, our queen. Any-

thing we can bear for her, even though we have discovered, even though we feel, we half guess, why we could not love poor Philip, and why—yes, 'tis true, you need not turn away, why, we shall have this heart-ache for ever. But it can be done—it shall. A fond, foolish fancy, makes him think he loves Lotty and Bear. So he does, so he ever will, but not as he is to love Margaret. No weakness on our parts shall mar that work. Our Margaret has had suffering enough; with Basil to guard her life, under God's blessing, she will know what happiness is. So now, Bear, go to bed; whatever occurs to us, still we would not be Carry and Flo.; and while that is the case, and our Margaret is happy, what more need we?"

CHAPTER XI.

Bear was very unfeeling, being in conduct more like a thoughtless, mischievous puppy, than the recipient of a grave and heavy secret; so that, when Lotty was dressing in the morning, he had to be scolded for childish behaviour on several occasions. It was so early, too, for his little mistress had hardly slept all night, and, as she noiselessly opened the hall door to let themselves out, Bear was quite rude in his efforts to rush past. It was a dark February morning, the stars were yet shining in the deep, gloomy sky, showing, by their little glancing lights, Basil leaning against a pillar of the portico."

"How early you are, Basil," said Lotty, at

once a stern heroine outwardly. "No one is stirring yet."

"Save you and I, Lotty, which is just what I wished. Mrs. Bankes, in particular, is, I trust, still snoring—"

"You seem to be quite afraid of her."

"How your heart beats, Lotty," interrupted Basil, as he drew her arm under his.

"No, it does not," said Lotty, angrily; "it is your own. I feel it against my arm."

"That I am willing to allow," answered he; "for if I only see Bear's nose, my heart is very much agitated."

"Bear is off over the fields, so do not put such nonsense upon him."

"I do not mean to do so; you know as well as I do, that when I see Bear, I expect his mistress."

They had been walking on during this conversation, and now came to a turn in the path; to the right was the cedar avenue, dark, close, mystical—a true lovers' bower. To the left was a stile of three steps, which led to a breezy knoll in the park. Basil paused.

"Sweet Lotty, if what I have to say seems to you precipitate, selfish, inconsiderate, impute these sins to Mrs. Bankes rather than to me——"

"You don't seem to like her," interrupted Lotty, in a short, dry tone.

"I may, ere long, love her, Lotty, for being the means of ending a suspense that has been hateful and harassing to me. Twice before, have I seen the happiness of my life slip from my grasp through over-many scruples. I might have waited—I would have waited yet a few months more, in pure delicacy to your mourning, but Mrs. Bankes' communication to you yesterday relieves me from silence. Lotty, I love you, sweetest, dearest Lotty—I woo you for my wife."

"You mistake, Basil," said Lotty, in a voice that might have come out of a marble quarry, it sounded so hard and cold. Basil made no answer, but suddenly put his arm round the slight waist, and, with one effort, he lifted her up and placed her on the upper step of the stile; then, with his arm still round her, he

knelt on the lower one, and looked straight into her eyes.

In his she read an answer to her remonstrance, that needed no words. Glowing with the love of a noble, truthful heart, with so much of entreaty, that hers beat with pain, knowing what she must do; with such a world of tenderness, it throbbed with wild happiness that she had gained such a look; with such a tide of past sorrows, with such a fear of present grief, no wonder that Lotty's slight figure began to tremble with the greatness of her task, and that so many mingled emotions brought the blood in rushing fever to her face. Unable to bear the ardent and entreating glance of those eyes, feeling that blush after blush rose in uncontrollable emotion, Lotty covered her face with her hands. But even in them did the crimson tide run to the finger-ends.

Nevertheless, unchanged was the firm voice, as she again said: "Basil, this is a mistake."

"How can I mistake, Lotty?" he answered, in the low voice of a heart's question.

"You forget the trees of the old forest, and what you told them. You remember not the old house, deep in the woods, whose walls heard your first secret."

"I remember them full well. I had a sorrow, and I gave it to them. I had a grief that required branding from the heart. I laid the burning finger of duty on the place, and it was done."

"Only to break forth the more luxuriantly, Basil, for the fortitude with which it was suppressed."

"It broke forth in a new light, happy and free—a pure fountain, welling up to the lips with brotherly love, as was meet, and no more."

"But now, Basil, now it may flow as you list. She knows you once loved her, Harold told her."

"Bethink you, sweet, loving Lotty, so quick to read all characters, what man could look at Margaret and ask her to love twice? Would she act by me thus, in sweet sisterly fondness, knowing that I once loved her otherwise, if she did not feel I would not insult her with a

thought of marriage? Ah, Lotty! your usually true judgment is at fault here."

"Margaret is of a nature so clinging, so fond," whispered Lotty, hurriedly, "so young, time might accustom her to the thought. Think what a long life to lead, all lonely and mourning!"

"She is not lonely, she never will be; she thinks of her Harold by day as walking by her side, though unseen; she sees him in her dreams at night, and communes with him. Look in her eyes, and mark if the remembrance of Harold and his fate leaves them for a moment."

"It is true her eyes retain the shadow of her grief; other thoughts, another happiness, may restore their light."

"Not by me shall that pure heart, consecrated to its first and only love, be outraged. The love I gave Margaret on her marriage, was sacredly a brother's; and so resolutely was any other torn up by its roots, that even in that lone forest house, most surely beneath those friendly trees, did another bud of love

begin to sprout, for a little thing with a child's face and a woman's heart."

"How very inconstant!" came from Lotty's lips, in a sort of flighty imitation of Mrs. Bankes' manner.

"And when we took that drive with Margaret to the ruined farm-houses, the bud grew to full and perfect blossom, until, at last, my whole heart is filled with the perfume of it."

"And yet you suffered me to marry Philip Leigh!" burst irrepressibly from Lotty's lips.

"Ah, Lotty! my Lotty! then, if I had asked then, I should not have been refused; nay, turn not away. Rather pity me, and think of my strange, sad fate, to be twice robbed of my hopes. This must excuse me, Lotty, if you think I have been too precipitate."

"I have nothing to excuse. If I were going to marry you, I might ask you to wait until the two years are over; but as I am not, no one need know that you have outraged my delicate feelings of decorum."

"In the dark, I must have mistaken Mrs. Bankes for my Lotty; surely——"

"You must not call me so And pray let me go, Basil; it is very cold, sitting like a turkey on the top of a rail, in February."

"Then my manhood's hopes are to be dashed to the ground, like my youth's dreams. You are merciless, Lotty."

"If one is to be disagreeable, it is best to do it well."

"You are free."

"Good bye, Basil."

As he released her, their eyes met.

"Lotty, if I consent to wait, that you may have ample time to see how true my opinion is, how mistaken yours—if I serve for you the time of a Rachel's price, ay, and double that—may I hope that you will also——"

"Wait! suppose I have the chance of marrying Mr. Bankes' red-haired cousin? Don't ask such a sacrifice."

"Not for worlds." A sunny light came into his eyes. "He is to be my only rival, then. Say so, Lotty. Ah! Lotty, make this one little concession to me, on which to hang a ray of hope."

"What concession?"

"You marry red-haired Mr. Bankes or me."

"I shall be in my grave before the one fact happens, so I can easily promise the other."

"Thank you a thousand times, and yet a thousand times to that. I begin my servitude to-morrow; it shall be my own fault, if I do not prove to you the truth of my opinions; and if I take strange methods to do so, it is but to bring it unmistakeably before your judgment."

"Do whatever you like, only remember my words—you are mistaken, you were mistaken, and if you are not careful, you will be mistaken."

"My choice is made; cold-hearted, but matchless Lotty, farewell!"

CHAPTER XII.

Mrs. Bankes was considerably surprised to find no Lord Erlscourt at breakfast, and still more so on hearing that he had departed for home.

"Dear me! is not his departure rather sudden?"

"Yes, it is," replied Margaret, in calm tones, "I had no idea he was going this morning, until I heard he was gone."

"I suppose to make preparations?" asked Flo.

"I have no doubt of it," answered Margaret, as calmly as ever.

"And when is it to be?" continued Flo., almost gasping with amazement.

"The moment the weather permits," was the quiet answer.

"In the name of goodness! Margaret," exclaimed Flo., "leave off your caps first."

It was now Lady Leigh's turn to look astonished, and with a faint blush on her fair cheek, she said, "Lord Erlscourt has gone to prepare for a voyage to Holland—but, in fact, I need not explain the matter to you, for you were in the room, half hidden by the window-curtain, when he proposed, and I accepted, this act of true brotherly kindness."

"And was that all you settled?"

"You heard the whole," answered Margaret, her dove's eyes beginning to brighten with indignation.

"I beg your pardon, I went away as soon as I could, and I met Lotty, and we two settled it could only be one sort of proposal—"

"My Lotty knows her Margaret better;" and fondly kissing her, Margaret left the room.

"Well, to be sure! off like an enraged queen. I wonder you put up with her airs, Lotty."

"She never gives me any."

"No, I recollect you never could do wrong; but, Lotty, I hope you did not go gossiping over with this news to your old Scotch friend; for if you did, you'll catch it, that's all."

"I will endure what I catch."

"I know you will, you good little thing! You are everybody's friend, and nobody's enemy but your own."

"That is the form of consolation bestowed upon him who loveth good wine, Flo."

"Pooh, pooh, child! but I wish you would listen to reason, from your best friend, I can tell you. Sooner or later, this marriage will take place, mark my words. The higher and more lofty my Lady Leigh holds her head, the sooner will she give in. I know precisely what her character is——"

"Ever since you thought it so odd, she did not (to use your own phrase, Flo.) prig my sugar-plums, when we were school-girls."

"You are very nonsensical this morning, Lotty; and where are you going now?"

"To a hamlet on the road to High Leigh, to take this prayer-book to a great sinner."

"My dear, I will go with you. I want a private chat with you, and I may put you in the way of doing a great deal of good, in a sensible way."

Bear gave a sort of howl, which was either caused by his own peculiar sense of the honour, or because Lotty pinched his ear.

"Bless that dog!" exclaimed Flo., on the spur of the start he gave her; "one would suppose he was a Christian, and was jealous at my proposing to walk with you."

"You are very jealous, are you not, Bear?" answered Lotty, pinching again.

Bear howled to a roar.

"Lotty, you must leave that dog at home; I will not go out with such a brute."

"Very well, Flo.—Bear, you are to stay at home."

Bear trotted off, apparently quite content; and when Flo. joined Lotty, in her walking dress, she expressed herself highly satisfied that he was not to be seen.

Lotty laughed, and said, "Don't exult until you are out of the wood."

On the road to the hamlet, Mrs. Bankes gave Lotty a long history of all her troubles and sorrows: how she and dear Fred. were fearfully in debt; how old Bankes, the father, would help them no more; how stingy he was, and cross, and how all might be delightfully arranged and settled, if she would come and live with them, and giving them three hundred pounds per annum, which she would never miss, they might even keep a little brougham. "For, my dear, words cannot tell you how cabmen cheat—they take a perfect fortune. Is this the hamlet, dear? how pretty! Bless me! why that dog is very like yours, only he looks more gentle."

"Come here, sir," said Lotty; "did I not tell you, you were not to walk with us, Bear?" for it was he, who wagged his tail, as much as to say he came by himself, and not with them.

"So you did," said Lotty, in answer to the mute appeal; "therefore, if you will behave like a gentleman, you may return with us."

"Lotty, that dog is just a demon, an evil spirit; if he were mine, I should certainly have

him destroyed. Does he understand all you say?"

"Yes, like a proper demon;—but here is my friend, whom I came to see.—I have brought you a prayer-book, to be ready for next Sunday."

"Thank ye, ma'am. My missus is main glad I be going to church; she says I must get faith to be good, and I dunna joost know what faith be."

"Your missus had faith, that when she married you, you would prove a good husband to her."

"Lord save ye, ma'am! I doubt I hanna been that."

"Does she now think you make her a bad one?"

"Bless her heart, no! my Betsy always thinks I'll mend."

"Then she has faith."

"Be that it, surely."

"Yes, and if Betsy has faith in you, a weak, erring mortal, why art thou of so little faith,

O man, that thou believest not in the goodness and mercy of God?"

"The Lord forgive me, sure! that's true. Please His goodness, I'll strive to mend."

"Lotty, my dear," said Flo., on returning home, "that man is a hypocrite, mark me."

"Why, Flo.?"

"He wishes to get something out of you, my dear, he is so ready to be converted."

"I think not, Flo.; he has had a miserable life for the last five or six years. Within these few months, Margaret has given him constant work, and the change from want and wickedness to competence, with self-respect, will have its due effect upon him."

"That is all very fine. You will find him spending all his money at the alehouse, instead of coming to church."

"Still, Flo., we shall have the satisfaction of thinking we did our best to reclaim him."

"Poor satisfaction."

Flo. would not have thought it such with all her flightiness, if she had seen the meeting of

Lotty and her friend at church the next Sunday, and, indeed, for many a Sunday after.

The look of happiness in Lotty's eyes as she made her gentle bow of recognition in the church porch, called a blush of pride and pleasure into the rough, coarse face of that sinning man. The rising blood came from a heart on which had fallen one good seed of kindly sympathy, and the spring once found, never failed.

CHAPTER XIII.

Easter-Tuesday arrived, an important day for Pru. The long, lingering attachment she had evinced for a certain curate, was brought to an abrupt close, and sprouted up with redoubled vigour and growth into an ardent affection for her rector husband. This being the seventh marriage recorded in this book, it fortunately happened to be unlike any of its predecessors in more than one respect.

First, John Grey insisted upon everybody walking to church. "For," said he, "that will afford Charlotte time to weigh well what she is about at the last moment."

Charlotte proved her appreciation of his kind thought, by walking more nimbly than

usual, which occasioned Lotty to remark, "that Pru. seemed to fear he might change his mind."

Pru.'s answer to this unkind speech was a laugh, which she intended to be scornful; but, alas! she was little gifted with the necessary commodity to express such a feeling, consequently it was such a merry little laugh, John kissed her hand before all the company on the spot.

Secondly, the wedding was so quiet, Pru. was nearly reduced to having the parish clerk for a bridesmaid, if Miss Rachel Clare had not kindly stepped in to the vacant responsibility. Lotty did propose the twins, but it seemed probable that half-way to church, the bride and bridegroom would have to take each a little bridesmaid up in their arms and carry them the rest of the way.

The third and last peculiarity was, that no smart chaise and four came to the door, with radiant and rubicund-faced post-boys streaming with favours and primed with beer. It was the bride and bridegroom who stayed at home while all the compauy went away. "For,"

said good John Grey, "Mr. Herbert left his parish to my care, and I do not mean to leave it, until he comes to resume his duties. Let those who wish it, remain and see mine and my Pru's. happiness. Those who think such a sight would overpower them, can leave."

So it fell out that they all left, "thus," as Lotty remarked, "depriving themselves of all the luck and advantages of having old shoes thrown after the carriage."

Lady Katherine returned home with Mr. and Mrs. Frank; Margaret to her mother, at Montague house, accompanied by Miss Rachel; Lotty to her own people, who were becoming rampant to have her. So Mr. and Mrs. Laird were the only people who remained in the neighbourhood, and witnessed now and then the happiness of the newly married; and as they were Scotch people, with good strong nerves, they bore the sight with the utmost composure and fortitude.

In April, Basil, with his brothers, departed on his voyage. His letters to Margaret were constant during the weeks he spent hovering

about that wild and weary spot, whose treacherous sands have engulfed so many high and noble hearts, and been the dread of all mariners, ever since the history of the world.

Though she had never told them so, Lotty and Basil knew that Margaret clung to the idea of recovering the body of her Harold. It seemed but the one thing wanting, ere she resolutely and for ever submitted to her lot. If she could visit some tomb, have something which contained his ashes, and where hers might mingle with them, it would suffice for her tender heart. The restless longing, the ever-recurring question, "Was he really gone?" appeared but natural; for her dead had never been removed from her sight. There had been no sick bed, with its hopes and fears, and sad preparation. No last words to be treasured up. No lifeless form, no touch of marble features; no closing of beloved and loving eyes, the extinction of whose light darkened a living heart for ever. Death takes all these, and much more to force itself in all the stern reality upon those who share but one

spirit between them. Thus the heaviness of the blow had, for the first year of her mourning, fallen with numbing effect upon her soul, in addition to the gentle endeavour to spare the poor, conscience-stricken mother; but as the frame recovered its elasticity, so did the feelings become more acute, rendering Margaret more restless and unhappy than she had been at all. Among other desires, was a wish to visit Cowes. A pining wish to tread in the place his footsteps had last pressed, to see the house he had lived in, and visit the last spots he had touched on earth, took possession of her. As if divining all Margaret felt, Lotty persuaded Lady Katherine to propose a visit to the sea-side for them all, and as the time settled for Basil's return home, was approaching, it seemed natural enough for them all to adjourn to the Isle of Wight.

Here, though eighteen months and more had elapsed since the tragedy occurred, they were too much the objects of interest to escape notoriety. So they retired to Bonchurch, making excursions from time to time,

to visit the places Margaret wished. Lotty had expected her to have this re-action; but she knew that when once the dark fit had passed, Margaret would be for the rest of her life-time resigned, nay, cheerful.

Unluckily for their desire to be quiet and alone, the ever-restless Mrs. Bankes had seen in the newspapers the account of their arrival at Bonchurch; and she and Carry being at that time in lodgings together at Ryde, agreed it would be no more than neighbourly, and a proper duty to their former school-fellows, if they left their gay quarters at Ryde, and took up their abode near them.

To Carry, the change was pleasant — she cared only for her babies. To Flo., the plan was advisable; she wished to pursue her designs on Lotty's liberty.

For in truth, Flo. and her husband were much embarrassed, as regarded pecuniary matters. And having been assisted several times by old Mr. Bankes, that gentleman had at last become angry and indignant, flatly refusing to assist them. And in addition to this very uncom-

fortable announcement, he had favoured Mrs. Frederick Bankes with his private idea of the matter, openly declaring it was her extravagance, thoughtlessness, and love of dress, that was ruining his amiable, good, but not over-wise son. Flo. was never backward in retorting; and, therefore, a scene ensued, which rendered it desirable that all parties should separate for a time. Flo. thought it a relief to join even Carry at the sea-side, and was civil to the babies, rather than lose this haven. It was therefore highly charming to know that Lotty was so near; and if she only could persuade her to live with them for a few months, she felt certain of being restored to favour in her husband's family. They were good, kind-hearted people, generous and forbearing, and by no means deserving the character Flo. gave of them.

But their old school-fellows were by no means so pleased to see them, and thought of quitting the field of action, when news came of the return of the "Ripple."

Poor Margaret gave way more than she had

ever done before, at this failure of her last hope of recovering the body of her Harold. And they let her surfeit herself with her grief. They felt certain that the remembrance of Harold's last words would soon return to her, and the wish to do all he had so fondly desired, would become her daily task.

Nothing now was left to her but the hope of being again united to him in another world, that hope he had so ardently expressed himself. But she had a great deal to do, duties to perform, certain things must be done, ere she prepared for that change which would restore her once more, and for ever, to her Harold. She must be up and doing—no blot must tarnish the brightness of that hour, no remembrance of things undone, no remorse for time wasted; she must be able to say, "I have done all that weak human nature could do, take now thy servant to rest."

Basil and Lotty kept strict ward and watch over their Margaret, that no invasion of Bankeses and Roystons should vex her per-

turbed spirit, during the few remaining days of their stay.

Lotty never left Mrs. Bankes' side for a moment, when calling at their house, which made that worthy person say to herself, "How fond that little thing is of me! she is a nice little soul, too, and *so* pretty; she will make quite a sensation while she is with me."

While Basil admired all Mrs. Royston's babies, and witnessed all their various performances with such interest, that she confided to Flo.: "It was a sad pity he was not married, and had children of his own."

"My dear, he is going to be," answered Flo., with vast importance. "When I was down at Court Leigh, the whole matter was entrusted to me, but, of course, confidentially, it being early days yet."

"But, dear Flo., you might tell me," coaxed Carry.

"Not for worlds," sternly answered Flo., charmed at perceiving Carry interested about something besides babies, and conceiving it her duty to be inexorable on that account.

"It cannot be Lotty," said Carry, sulkily; "for though his brothers brought her a number of presents, he never gave her one, and hardly speaks to her, that I can see."

"My dear, be patient, then, indeed, you will see what you will see; but I cannot have Lotty flirting with those boys—I must speak to her. Presents, indeed! what business has she to be accepting presents from young men?—she will get herself into a fine mess."

"And I heard them asking her for a lock of hair, in return."

"True, so they did; but I was glad to perceive that she had sufficient discretion to refuse her own, though she gave them some of the dog's. Ah, me! I must warn her—it is but a step from Bear's tail to her head."

It need hardly be mentioned, that before long, Carry was in full possession of all Flo. had to tell, whether true or not; the love of gossiping being superior to the wish of teazing Carry.

On the morrow after this conversation, they both agreed to pay a long visit to their old

school-fellows, and spying out all they could, mutually to reveal all to each other, compare notes, and draw their own conclusions. But the visit was not paid, inasmuch as on their road to the house, they met the heavy travelling coach and four of Lady Katherine, well packed and crammed, and caught a glimpse of the old Lady, sitting bolt upright, as if still in presence of the gracious Queen Charlotte, of the fair sad face of Margaret, of Lotty, and Lottina, bo-peeping at each other for amusement, evidently one and all prepared for a long journey."

"Law!" exclaimed Flo., in a tone of indignant disappointment.

"Gracious Heavens!" murmured Carry; "young Sir Harold is outside! on the box! with the butler! ! !"

CHAPTER XIV.

Truly they were all on their road home, where they duly arrived, and were welcomed by Mr. and Mrs. Grey.

John Grey said, "Talk of Darby and Joan! all I can tell you is, it would take six Darbies and six Joans, to equal mine and my Pru.'s happiness." Mrs. Laird came over the next morning, and kissed and blessed them all, as if she had not had a moment's peace or happiness since they left.

"And sae my lord's aff i' the morrow?"

"Yes, Mammy Laird," said Lotty in her glee and happiness, "he has devoted himself long enough now, to Margaret; he must go and see after his own affairs."

"I am thinking he wad hae gettin a bit business here to sattle, my bairn, ere he went back."

"He has no business here, you foolish mammy, except to do as you do, and that is, spoil us."

"Hoot! bairn, it's my belief you are come hame, more full of mischief nor ever. Hae ye quarrelled, hinney?"

"Such a question! just as if any one could quarrel with me, Mrs. Laird."

"Dinna ye think ower weel o' yersell: aye, but ye are the bonniest thing—But I'll say nae mair: ony just tell me, hae ye and my Lord no hit it joost?"

"What have you been doing, Mammy Laird, during our absence? taking to bad ways, I fear."

"He no spaks a word till ye, and he no luiks at ye, and he gangs ane way, when ye come the tither—I dinna understand it, bairn."

"Ask him then, if you are so unhappy; perhaps out of kindness to you, he will say for once, 'my dear Lotty, I hope you

are well,' or 'have you walked to-day?' or 'have—'"

"Be dune wi' a' yer clashing and nonsense. I'll no expect ony sense out of ye, if ye dinna mind, my bonny, bonny darling thing."

It was of no use to ask any more questions, or to find fault; the very sight of her, made Mrs. Laird's heart go pit-a-pat, as if the doctor was sueing again for her maiden hand; she said—"I'll aye scold her weel, byes and byes, but I am just daft wi' sight o' her; surely she is getting more bonny and winsome every day."

"Now Lotty, my best Lotty!" said Margaret, "you and I will spend a good and happy winter. We shall be alone; Basil does not thiuk to come near us again, until spring, and my mother must not move in the winter: Lady Katherine will be with her John Grey. I have sent for a number of books, and you must read aloud to me; we must break Master Harold into learning some lessons, and then you must help me all about the property."

"Good me!" said Lotty, "I am very glad that you have ceased talking. Except for the voice, I thought it was Flo., chattering on."

Margaret kissed her, smiling, and said—"Saucy thing, why may not I chatter like others? But I wish to tell you a good thing, Lotty: Messrs. Moneypenny have sent their clerk over here, to tell me another remittance has come from Australia of two thousand five hundred pounds, and with the bill is a short note, saying it is to be placed to my account; and here is the note, Lotty: it is undoubtedly in Mr. Price's handwriting."

"It is very like it, certainly."

"See! I have collected some old letters of his, and it is exactly the same. Now is this not a good thing, Lotty?"

"For you, very, Queen Margaret—"

"For me! you bad Lotty; can you not think how good it is, that this man repents? No more will my Harold's name be stained with the stigma, that through negligence, ignorance, or indolence, he incited a soul to sin.

Ah! Lotty, what is the money, doubled, trebled, in comparison to that?"

"Dear Meg.! I love you, and think as you do."

"And now, Lotty, I may with a clear conscience raise a monument to his name. I mean no outward show, no vain glorying, no pompous epitaph. In my heart of hearts is my Harold's name written, never more to be effaced from that innermost spot. But I should like, Lotty, in his name, and for his sake, to build that little church: I have money, for, dear Lotty, the credit side at Messrs. Moneypenny's bank is now in favour of the Court Leigh estates; and in gratitude to God, I may begin to spend in His service. The schools also! indeed I have many things to do, before—before—"

"When, Margaret?"

"I join my Harold."

"Ah! Margaret, is that the goal of your desires? is it this idea that makes you welcome each new day with joy, and yet bless

the evening of each day, as a still greater boon?"

"Yes, yes, it is this, only this!" and locking her fair fingers together, Margaret's face became changed; Lotty saw with surprise that her eyes looked upwards, as if she beheld a sight that Lotty could not see: she appeared to think she was alone with this viewless vision, for whisperingly from her lips came the words—

"Yes, Harold, another year has almost passed, I am so much nearer to you; I will leave our children well fitted, and of age to cope with the world. The name of Leigh shall be honoured and blest: then, Harold, my Harold, we meet, to part no more."

As Lotty marked the words, and viewed the absorption of Margaret's heart, a flood of light flashed up into her eyes, the rosy blood spread hither and thither, high up on the snowy brow, and down the little white throat; brighter, more vivid, until at last, with her face all scarlet, Lotty glanced in a sort of shame-faced way at Margaret—she was still

absorbed; so stealing shyly away, Lotty went off to hide these emotions, so strange and new to her, in a covert, where not even Bear could find her. It was some hours ere they met again; both were restored to their usual state of mind, which in Lotty had consisted for some time of a morose character: very naughty and unloveable she was at times.

"Lotty, dear!" said Margaret, "I do not think you bade Basil farewell, when he went away."

"No!" said Lotty, shortly.

"Have you two quarrelled, my best Lotty?"

"No! thank you, that would be taking trouble for nothing."

"There is something not quite kind about you at present, and I do not know whose fault it is."

"It is a matter of so little consequence, I wonder you trouble your head about it."

"Do you deem me so selfish and unkind that I see nothing, even when it concerns my two dearest and best friends?"

"I implied nothing of the sort, Margaret; I but insinuated it was of no moment whether Basil and I were friends or not."

"Ah! I have suspected something was the matter for some time: he never writes to you now, or sends you little, loving messages, and even calls you Mrs. Leigh."

"And very proper too; it is high time he should remember that I am not little Lotty."

"If his conduct pleases you, my Lotty, little wilful Lotty, then must I be satisfied? but I had a wish, a fond wish—"

"Which you had better scatter to the four winds at once," interrupted the little Bear, Lotty.

* * * * *

So they passed a busy and quiet winter, during which a faint bloom rose in Margaret's cheeks, that the sharp winter blasts sometimes deepened into a glow.

Gerald had been written to about the new church, and had sent his cordial consent and

approbation, welcoming as much as his parishioners did, the idea of keeping Mr. Grey among them.

Lotty insisted upon endowing the new church, when completed, for it would benefit the estate of High Leigh more than any other place. "Besides," said she, "it is Philip's legacy—his memorial tablet."

"Ech, bairn! it's wonderfu' the rock o' sense in that wee head. I wad like to see ye do something joost no canny, or by ordinar foolish," said Mrs. Laird.

"Bear shall pull Cowslip's tail. Will that do?"

"Hoot awa! at aye time, Miss Rachel, she's no canny, this bairn."

"Canny or not, Mrs. Laird, we cannot help loving her," said Miss Rachel.

"And sae Mistress Herbert's to the fore agin, and they'll be hame the next summer."

"Yes, Mammy Laird; she is growing strong, well, and fat; so it will be an encouragement to us to go, when we are miserable and thin," said Lotty.

"My certie! when will we see thon? though I'm speering you're no that weel, my bairn."

"I have thought so for some time, Mrs. Laird," said Margaret, just coming up. "I think she pores over those learned books too much, and that makes her—"

"Cross!" interrupted Lotty.

"Nay, nay," continued Margaret; but I have come to make a proposal—shall we not have the first stone of the new church laid next Tuesday, the fourteenth of February?"

"No; I will not have it so," said Lotty.

"Why, my Lotty, it seems to me, after being dead for two or three years, the Little Bear has come to life again," answered Margaret, in surprise.

"Then that is an additional reason the beginning of so good a deed should not commence on such an evil day."

"The Little Bear has returned, without any doubt. Ah, Pru.! you are just in time," continued Margaret: "would you believe it?—Lotty is cross."

"Oh! pray excuse me, dear Margaret, but

I cannot believe it; neither, I am sure, will John," said Mrs. Grey.

"Nay, judge for yourself: she will not suffer the first stone of the new church to be laid upon her birth-day."

"Oh!" exclaimed Pru., with great animation, "it must, it shall!—and it is a most curious circumstance, John and mamma settled it on that very day too."

"Then, that decides it, best Lotty; so, kiss me, and say you are a good girl, and will never be so naughty again."

"Take the kiss, if you wish it, Margaret; but as for the promise, I cannot give it."

"Now, is she not a little Bear?" said Margaret, turning to Pru.

Pru. was all anxiety to know if she was quite well. The cholera had broken out in Newcastle-on-Tyne, and she much feared there was a bad, infectious air about. To which kind concern for her health, Lotty only replied, by throwing up the window, on that cold winter day, and walking straight into the supposed bad air. But the clear, bracing

atmosphere blew away her crossness, and when, in the afternoon, she and Margaret met Dr. Laird, after their brisk walk of three miles, their blooming looks called forth his highest encomiums.

"That's the way, ladies, that's the way to cheat your doctor. Walk like that every day of your lives, never mind a driving sleet shower or a smart brush of hail, as I see you have not to-day, and you will live, with God's blessing, the allotted portion of man's life, hale and vigorous to the close."

"Ech, doctor! I dinna ken which is bonniest o' them twa. I thought there was nae rosebud like our little leddy of High-Leigh, but, with the colour in her cheek, and the happy light in her eyes, the Leddy Leigh is a picture o' beauty." Thus said Mrs Laird, in confidence, to her husband, that same evening.

"I never saw two like them Janet; and to think that they should be widows, poor young things, both on them!"

"They winna be that lang, doctor, I am

thinking. My Lord Erlscourt kens as weel as we do, they are no to be matched."

"Hoot, woman! do you mean to make a Turk of my lord?—he canna marry both."

"Ye needn't fleech at me, Alick; I kens what a kens. I'm a Scotchwoman, and we are no given to luve twice. My Leddy Leigh is my Leddy Leigh, and I'll sae nae mair nor nae less."

"You think she will bide so. Weel, maybe; but, oneyways, Mrs. Leigh has had nae sich heart-grief. If my lord fancies her, maybe she'll no objec."

"Fancies her! ech, fancies her!—and ye ca' yersel' a man o' pairts, Alick!"

"Come, Janet, don't flyte out at me like that. I'll agree that I am no so sharp as you in luve matters, if that wull content ye."

"I kenned that oure weel afore, man. Fancies her, indeed!—Gang yer ways and get a pipe, doctor, to compose ye, for yer very aggravating this afternoon."

The doctor laughed, and contentedly departed to obey her injunctions. So the thir-

teenth of February came, and all was prepared for the next day's ceremony.

"There is a letter from Basil, and he says nothing about coming for to-morrow," said Margaret, in a disappointed tone.

"Then, I suppose, he will not come," answered Lotty.

"He sends no message to you, Lotty."

"I did not expect one, Meg."

"But he asks after Bear."

"You can tell him he has two grey hairs in his tail."

"Lotty! Lotty! — but, perhaps, he has written to you?"

"To me!—wherefore?"

"To tell you Brian is going to Oxford, and Hugh insists upon becoming a civil engineer."

"That boy was always examining the interior of steam-engines, and pulled everything to pieces, only to find out how it was made."

"They both send their love to you, Lotty, but Basil must have forgotten his."

"As I expected none from him, I am not disappointed."

Margaret tried to read the little Bear's imperturbable countenance in vain.

"That night Lotty was again absorbed in thought ere she went to bed, and the great Bear had to touch her more than once.

" Yes, Bear, I know. But we are in a difficult position. Another year, if not two, must pass. We cannot tell what time may do. Bear and Lotty are not to do any thing that they may hereafter repent. Our Margaret is so much better, so much more cheerful, and she has so many cares, requiring a man's help. It may turn out, to be a necessary good, an absolute want. Though we are young, and supposed to be not over-wise, we have had our experiences, Bear ; and thus we have reason to think that changes almost as startling as the Ethiop changing his skin, and the leopard his spots, might occur, and do occur, in this grey, hoary-headed, venerable, old world. And what a silly foolish, childish, not to say wicked, world it is sometimes, Bear. However, we cannot mend it ; we can only do our duty ; and if Lotty loves Bear, and Bear

loves Lotty, I dare say, whatever occurs, they will make themselves happy." Bear kissed Lotty after canine fashion, in token of perfect agreement in all she said; and then wishing him good-night, Lotty passed with noiseless footfall into the sleeping apartment she shared with Margaret.

The sound of a low voice made her pause on the threshold. Again were the fair fingers laced together, the upturned face and inspired eyes beholding a vision Lotty could not see, and from the parted lips came Margaret's words, speaking to her Harold. If possible, more fervent, more urgent, more exalted than before, were her looks and words, making Lotty blush again, with a vivid brightness. But she whispered to herself—

"It matters not. She mourns her Harold as deeply as if she lost him yesterday. But wait we will, Bear."

CHAPTER XV.

This Valentine's-day rose dark, stormy, and snow-ridden. As Lotty peeped out of the window, the light of the candle by which she was dressing, made everything appear as if still wrapt in the gloom of a gusty night.

"Heed it not, Bear, we have been out in darker, more stormy mornings than this; we will go into the cedar walk, until the day speaks out a little stronger. But after all, Bear, I do not think it is so bad—the candle deceived us."

As she spoke, she opened the door, and passed out. A hand stayed her, and a voice, low but thrilling, said, as if it asked a momentous question,

"Is this my Lotty?"

"No, it is Mrs. Leigh," answered she, with somewhat of the freezing morning in her tone.

"I hope Mrs. Leigh is quite well," answered Basil, taking off his hat, and bowing with such extreme politeness, that a flock of little mad snow-flakes, driven under the *porte-cochère* by the freaks of the wind, clutched hold of his fair curls to save themselves a further flight, and in their refuge found their death.

"Quite well, thank you, Basil; and so is Margaret."

"Lotty, I must walk with you," exclaimed Basil; his assumed manner vanishing.

"Pray do," answered she.

He drew her arm within his, and they passed on to the cedar walk.

"And so, Lotty, I am to have no better comfort than this, for acting the part of a dissembler, a hypocrite, the past year?"

"Hypocrite! how so?"

"Obliged to smother my real feelings, hide

my heart's wish, affect a coolness, that only created a still more burning love—"

"Don't be absurd, Basil! I will allow you have been very good—in fact, nothing could have succeeded better. Margaret imagines we do not care one straw for each other."

"We! thank you, Lotty; if I can persuade you to grant me no more, I can live upon that 'we' for some time."

"It was a slip, Basil."

"'Twas said; nothing can drive it from the place where memory has placed it. Now, Lotty, answer me truly. Can you yet so wilfully deceive yourself as to think Margaret would marry again?"

"Not at present, certainly," answered Lotty, blushing again, at the remembrance of Margaret's constancy to the dead.

"And pray, how long will it take to convince you?"

"I won't be bullied, Lord Erlscourt."

"I feel very much inclined to take you in my arms and carry you off, you are so very

wilful," said he. "You were forced to marry once—"

"For shame, Basil! Take example by that marriage; if you want me to love you, abide my own time."

"Concession the second. Thanks, Lotty; remember, if I seem impatient, the prize I am trying for, and the utter unreasonableness of your ideas."

"Wait until I have proved them such."

"I suppose," continued he, "that you know when Millicent returns, Miss Rachel is going to live with Margaret."

"No, I did not. Who arranged this?"

"I did; and that is the reason I prevented her applying for the governess's place at the school in Warrington. She shall be governess to young Harold and his sister, and Margaret's companion."

"I am Margaret's companion."

"Yes, at present, and so is her mother. But, by-and-bye, when God calls Lady Montagu to the home not made by hands, for which she is so fitted, and a certain wilful

Lotty may plead Margaret's lonely state as a reason for driving a faithful, loving heart to despair, Miss Rachel will step in as the panacea to so much woe."

"Men are so selfish," answered she.

"In matters of the heart, Lotty, they ought to be, from justice to the merits of her they love. For my part, such is my opinion of the love that an honest and true heart should offer to another heart worthy of it, all the world must be as a grain of sand in comparison. When I am permitted to show my love, but the God who made her, and gave to me the priceless boon of her affections, shall have my adoration before her."

"All that sounds remarkably fine; keep it for a fitting occasion. Meantime, without much conceit, let me tell you, Lotty is Lotty to Margaret. No Rachel will take her place."

"That is true; in fact, though there is a wilful Lotty, a spoilt one, a childish one, a cruel, merciless, aggravating one, yet is there but one Lotty in the world, and she is matchless. Now do not turn away. I want to tell

you, that it is as much for Margaret's sake, as for any selfish motive of my own, that I have counselled her to offer Miss Rachel a permanent home."

"Wherefore?"

"For this reason. There is between these two women a bond so peculiar, that it may be said to have been rivetted together with the scalding tears of bitter agony, and therefore no human forge can sever the links. As Harold and the little sister sank together, hand in hand, leaving their earthly frames a prey to the remorseless sea, while their purified spirits rose at the same moment to the footstool of God; so will these two mourning, but resigned hearts, go hand in hand through the world, each feeling that they are to be to the other a substitute for those they have lost; each hoping to assist each other during the weary time they must wait God's pleasure. Thus, Lotty, this bond between Margaret and Rachel, in no one way affects her love for you. You will still be the bright spirit that will enliven her, the link that will keep her feelings

young, the happy medium through which light and flowers may yet bloom in her path. But Rachel—the sight of Rachel stirs her up, to be about and do the work allotted her—Rachel, whose little sister died a cruel death, her hand clasped in that of Margaret's Harold, without a murmur."

"I will never leave Margaret, as long as she requires me."

"And I will never ask you to do so while that is the case. But, Lotty, say something kind to me, give me a little hope; a word, nay, a look; anything on which to think, on which, when I grow very impatient, I may ponder, and be content."

"Well then, I think—yes, I am sure—I like you better than Flo.'s red-haired cousin."

"Out on you, for the smallest yet most pungent morsel of cruelty ever man met!"

"Flo. is very generous in her proffers of friendship and hospitality. I get a letter once a month, asking me to go and live with her and dear Fred."

"Pray go, if you wish it," uttered Basil, resigning her arm.

"By-the-bye, Basil, do take care, if we go to the sea-side this summer, that it is in some remote corner of the coast, where we cannot possibly be discovered by Carry and Flo.—But, oh! ye stars, if Margaret is not tapping at the window. How could you suffer me to be late for breakfast, Basil?"

Basil was in no mood to respond, so he went in to greet Margaret, while Lotty ran up stairs to change her things. When she reappeared, so fresh and blooming, with a sad wicked spirit of mischief dancing in her eyes; Margaret met her with very inquisitive looks, saying eagerly: "So you have been walking with Basil?"

"No," said Lotty, "he walked with me."

Margaret gazed from one to the other, in a little sort of flush of expectation; but Basil was calmly cutting a loaf of bread, and Lotty said, "Lady Montagu, here are two violets."

"I said, you would be sure to come to-day, Basil," then began Margaret; "not only be-

cause we are to lay the first stone of the new church, but because of Lotty's birth-day."

"Is it your birth-day, Mrs. Leigh?" said Basil, with an assumption of indifference, that would have done honour to a Spartan, while he helped himself to an egg with the utmost solicitude.

"I believe so," answered Lotty, in a tone to match.

"I have to beg your pardon, for bringing you no offering suitable to the day," continued he, most wickedly; for all the time he had a certain parcel in his pocket, that was to have been given, if—. A frown passed over his fair brow as this if, intruded itself.

"I will endeavour to survive without," retorted Lotty.

"Do you know you teaze me very much, you two," said Margaret. "Did you not always think, mamma, that they were such friends?"

"The quarrels of friends are the renewal of love, my dear," said Lady Montagu, quoting the proverb, for no particular idea that it was at all applicable.

Lotty grew crimson. Basil glanced at her, and said, with the utmost composure : "I think, Mrs. Leigh, you and I have not arrived at that point of interest, in which a quarrel might be said to affect us, either in love or malice."

"I don't wish to quarrel with you, Basil," answered Lotty, recovering herself, "and beg to announce the fault will be yours, not mine, if we do."

But in the course of the day, she took occasion to whisper, "That was very well done on your part, Basil." And so he departed the next day, with only that crumb of comfort, after assisting at the laying of the first stone of the church.

The day had proved fair, in spite of its stormy commencement ; and no heart assisted at the good deed, which did not feel a solemn compact was made by Lady Leigh, that this church was but the beginning of many good works, which she meant to rear in memory to her Harold. Within this house of prayer, she would pray for strength to "do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with her God."

CHAPTER XVI.

Happy was the life at Rose Leigh. John Grey had been so charmed with the name of Pru., he was in the habit of doubling it. It was delightful to see the enjoyment of Lady Katherine; experiencing, for the first time, the happiness of a real home, unshackled by forms and ceremonies.

And as if to make amends to the world in general, and to her dependants in particular, for the stately reserve she had formerly kept up, she now opened her heart to everybody who would take the trouble of listening to her. We have seen that she was fond of talking at all times, though she would in earlier days talk only to those she deemed her equals.

Now it was very different; she had learnt to consider herself but another morsel of dust, distinguished from countless others by little that was good, and more that was bad and unchristianlike. At least, such was her humble judgment of herself, without ever losing the impression that she had lost her son through her own pride and folly; she yet only used this remembrance as a spur to make her more kind, more humble, more charitable to every one.

Under a stern and severe disciplinarian, she would have become a rigid and penance-seeking devotee. Under the gentle, wholesome doctrine of John Grey, she was being born again, receiving the sweet spirit of a little child. Even her countenance, her speech, the very rustle of her stiff silk dresses, showed the change. Who could have recognised the Lady Katherine of six years before? Never with any pretensions to beauty, yet with no particular bad feature, her appearance had been always rather forbidding, from her expression of pride. Cold, and stately, she never unbent; severe and harsh upon little minor faults, more the

result of habit than opinion, the eye that met hers trembled to think how she would visit sins and omissions, without being aware she had been taught to consider these minor faults as heinous crimes.

Always painfully erect, and always giving voice to equally painful maxims, at the time when this story commences, Lady Katherine could not have pointed out a single person who loved her, out of her own circle ; and within that, to the very centre, not one who did not fear her. In addition to her harsh and unloving countenance, she had a very austere way of dressing : with marked features and strong lines, she did not permit her own grey hair to mellow down the ravages of time by its softening influence on each side of her face, but had a wig of very shining black hair, that divided itself into straight black lines on her brown and wrinkled forehead, and then rolled itself, or was rolled, into three great curls, that for smoothness, oiliness, and compactness of shape, could be compared to nothing either elegant or graceful. Then her dresses were

all so remarkably stiff and uncompromising, both in colour and texture, that it was sufficient to hear them rustle, to make her servants and children fly. But now the black wig was gone, and the smooth bands of soft, silver hair, came low on her faded cheek, with the edging of rich lace all round, making the withered face look fresh and comely, with so fair a frame. And the gentle pleased expression that had taken the place of the cold harsh air, did it not tell more than words can describe, that the sweet incense of a christian heart was implanted within that erect frame; a warm-hearted child-like spirit now dwelt where only stately propriety had ruled?

It was remarkable, that, whereas she had always found fault before, now she was always in a general buzz of praise Everybody was so kind, everybody was so thoughtful, everybody seemed always to be doing just what was most proper towards everybody. Not the lowest servant about the place, not the meanest beggar she ever saw, not the smallest child she met, but she addressed. Then would she

dilate in the twilight evenings upon all he said, and she said, and they said, and John Grey would make comments thereon, while Pru. listened and hemmed small frills. Thus they spent pleasant evenings, and the old Lady's heart bloomed and expanded under this new and exciting species of life—at least, it was such to her who had been dead and cold before. This evening they had a great deal to talk about.

"My dear John, I met a beggar, such a nice-looking, respectable beggar.

"That is well," said John; "and for what did he beg?"

"My dear John, that was the nice part of it—he did not beg as beggars usually do."

"How respectable of him," returned John.

"Very truly so, John, he begged for work, some employment."

"And what did you promise him? To build a new house, make a new garden, invent a new walk?"

"No, John," said the innocent Lady Katherine. "I said nothing about such things, for

without your advice, I should not venture to propose anything of the sort. I told him to come up here at nine o'clock to-morrow, John and you would give him some work."

"Can he hem frills, think you, my dear mother? I fear my Pru.-Pru. will never finish those frills."

"I have only hemmed seventeen, dear John," said the gentle Pru."

"And how many more are wanted, sweet wife?"

"About twelve, dear John."

"Then, mother, we shall have work for your beggar."

"Nay, John, my beggar is a man, a good stout, strong man—he has been a sailor."

"Alas! and we have nothing but the duck-pond whereon he can exercise his talents."

"But he can do many other things; he can cook, John, and wait at table, and on gentlemen. He can do anything but ride a horse, dear John."

"Then I feel myself called upon to declare

that the only thing for which I wanted an extra man was to ride my horse."

"But Plantagenet is so quiet a beast," remonstrated the literal Lady Katharine.

"We know not how long he may so remain, madam. Pru. remarked that he whisked his tail greatly to-day."

"Ah! John, John, you are very jocose, I see, but you will find some work for this poor respectable beggar, I dare say."

"Yes, in good truth, or I shall not think respectably of myself."

It is true that John Grey on several occasions found Lady Katherine's enthusiasm had perhaps a little over-rated the objects of it. But for this he was always prepared. However, as regarded the respectable beggar, there was no need to be under any restraint, he was certainly very respectable.

It was in this manner, these three people lived together, and no wonder, with two such loving innocent, simple companions, John Grey had all his own way, and twisted and turned them

round his great finger in a most heartless manner.

Suddenly a rival entered the peaceful home, but John Grey, all unconscious of the hold he would gain over his Pru.-Pru's heart, welcomed his son with the greatest delight, while every body who came to see the little stranger, exclaimed, "John Grey," so quaintly and curiously like his father was he. As he sat by his pale wife's bedside reading the Holy Scripture words to her, he could not but notice how her eyes dwelt fondly on this little image of himself. So kneeling down by the bedside, in a soft whisper, that she only could hear, he said,

"I thank Thee, O Father, for this new mercy, for sparing the life more dear to me than my own; for giving us another, to bring up to Thy service. And let the image she has so faithfully given him, be a new impulse to me, to cherish and be grateful for such love as hers."

The next event was Lotty's return home from visiting her people, bringing Mr. and Mrs. Frank and the twins with her, and they

were, like every one else, truly surprised and amazed at young John Grey.

The father John began to declare they were all unkind, as in his opinion the son John was anything but handsome. In fact it is on record that he considered him as bearing a great resemblance to a red-faced, inebriated young frog. Certainly both Johns had been bountifully supplied by Nature with the material for mouths.

So the summer came on; and as it passed away, Margaret caught herself wishing that the long days were longer still, she had so much to do: the education of her children, the care of her mother, the ordering of her household; each and all were done, as if each were but the sole business she had. And joined to all these was the well doing of her large estate, in which not even the cutting down of a tree occurred without her knowledge.

As autumn approached, they had the prospect before them of welcoming home the long absent Millicent and Gerald. It was on a calm soft evening in October, that Margaret

was under the walnut avenue, waiting the glad sight of their carriage. Two other figures were strolling up the avenue as well, from whom came many a mirthful sound, and laughter such as rings from little silver bells in a sunshiny heart.

"How merry my little Lotty is," thought Margaret, as the sounds rose up clear in the silent air, pealing up into the arches of the fine old trees. "And I—I am happy also; yes truly! I bless God for my life of calm repose, yet never ceasing employment. Perhaps no rapturous delight is mine: but then in tumultuous overflowing joy, there must ever be reaction; we pay in some measure for an overplus. Life must be consistent; an even quantity of joy and sorrow, feasting, and mourning is allotted to each of us, if we would but see it. I must be—I am grateful to Thee, oh, God!"

"Margaret, Margaret, they are coming! we see the carriage!" exclaimed Lotty.

In a few minutes they arrived; they were in each other's arms, warm welcome kisses were

given and exchanged. The length of their absence seemed atoned for, by the delight of their return.

* * * *

How much they had to tell, to see, to rejoice at—how much to listen to, of the life and welfare of those they loved so well. Millicent was stronger and better than ever she had felt before, and showed her two little ones, with pride and delight. A grave sorrow was in Gerald's eyes; it seemed habitual there; but a gentle smile illumined his face, with an expression they remembered not in him; it was full of love and humility.

"My Lotty! Margaret is almost like her old self," said Milly, in one of the numerous confidences that were taking place among them all.

"Yes, is she not? I look forward to the time when my earliest thought or day-dream will be realised," answered Lotty.

"What is that, Lotty?"

"You know it: at least, if you remember

the greenhouse at Montagu Hall, the rooks going home to their dinner, the old Forest home."

"I remember all this, and say, Basil. But still I cannot guess what you mean."

"You and Margaret must be sisters indeed."

"Ah! Lotty, I see it is true, what Margaret says, you are changed."

"In what way?"

"You must be changed, if you think Margaret would—nay, I will not say it; much as I honour and love my brother, highly as I venerate and esteem such a character, I trust he will never cast a blot upon it, by seeking to marry Margaret. Tell me, Lotty, surely no such thought has stained his upright mind?"

"Pray, why should it not? what could be more natural, loving her as he did, from her childhood?"

"But, Margaret, our Queen Margaret! faultless in all things, she will never—no, I

will not believe it, and I wish I had delayed my return home, if Basil intends—"

"Don't worry yourself: Basil is very far from intending anything of the sort, to my sorrow. I do not like Margaret passing a long and lonely life."

"It is not so to her; she has her mother, her children, her cares and estates, that charming Miss Rachel—lastly, and almost least, you, Lotty."

"How did Margaret tell you I was changed, Milly?"

"She said you no longer laughed merrily, excepting the evening we came home; that you buried yourself in your books, and had become pale and thin; and besides, it was privately whispered to me, that there were strong symptoms the little Bear was come to life again."

"Shall I give you a specimen of his ferocity now, Milly?"

"No, thank you, dear. But, seriously, Margaret is unhappy about you: she thinks you

are not pleased that she has taken Miss Rachel to live with her—"

"Nay, Heaven forbid! Margaret must think her Lotty changed, if she deems her so base as that."

"Then what is it, Lotty?"

"I will mend my manners, Milly, so that even Gerald shall say, I am a true penitent. Think no more of my sins, and let us talk of other things."

"As you like, Lotty: Basil met us at Liverpool, but he would not come on here with us."

"That was unbrotherly."

"We are to spend Christmas with him, then perhaps he may return with us."

"Perhaps, as he will have you to visit."

"Does he come often to see Margaret?"

"I believe so. Whenever she wants advice, he flies down on telegraphic wings, which, I presume, are quicker than wind ones now."

"I thought he had grown handsomer than ever, Lotty."

"I have not seen him these eight or nine

months, I believe ; unluckily, I was always absent when he came.

"You believe ! how coldly you talk, and so fond of Basil as you used to be."

"Yes," said Lotty, yawning, "that was when I was a school-girl ; I have become very fond of botany now, and I want Margaret to go to Wales : in Brecknockshire I hear you can find almost every rare wild flower or fern, known in Great Britain. Think of that now, Milly."

"Lotty, Lotty ! you are a changeling."

"Both Lotties love you, so do not be angry."

* * * *

And so at last they all settled into their usual places, and no event of any importance occurred, but that Lotty's mood changed again : from being a cross, little, irritable Bear, she was now so subdued, so gentle, so loving, in all her ways, no one knew how to make enough of her.

"Bairn, bairn ! what for dinna ye clack on

wi' yer bit pratty ways?" said Mrs. Laird, who half disliked her change. "Ye're sae saft and sae douce like, and your een aye fill wi' tears at the first word; bairn, ye hae getten a luik like as of anither warld, and I wad I might be in my cauld grave, ere I lost sight o' ye, for ye air just the darling of old Janet Laird's heart."

"After a naughty fit, it is time to be good, Mammy Laird," answered Lotty.

"Naughty! Weel, bairn, when ye do harm to ere a body in this wicked warld, Janet Laird will turn highway-woman. Ye hae a trouble in yer heart, bairn?"

"Yes, Bear is getting lazy, and loves the fire more than Lotty."

Bear arose, and laying his beautiful head on Lotty's lap, endeavoured to blink and wink an indignant denial.

"Aye me! but thon doggie gets mair sensible day by day—he'll be speaking sune. And sae ye wunna tell me yer trouble?"

"I have none, but—"

"What noo, my heart's bairn?"

"Suppose I should leave you, and go away, would you love me still?"

Mrs. Laird at first sat down stunned, and then she cried bitterly: suddenly, looking at Lotty's face, and seeing it half blushes and half smiles, a light broke into her mind, illuminating the strong Scotch features, bedewed with great tears.

"The Lord bless us! No possible, bairn. Bairn, dinna rin like that. Joost what the doctor and me's been a-praying for. Hoot! the lassie's gane aff like the sna drift, and I'll no catch her. She's joost a bit fairy, wi' her tricks. But I'll aye bide her time. My certie, I'll blythely bide a wee, and whatten a gay laugh I'll hae at the doctor."

"Lotty, love," said Margaret, "why do you make me love you so much? Suppose I had to part from you."

"You would miss me, then?"

"Miss you! my best and dearest Lotty? Ask the flowers if they bloom without their sun-beams; ask the birds if they would sing without their mates."

"Say the word then, and Lotty is yours for life."

"Only in one way could I bear to lose you, Lotty, and that would be no loss, but a blessed gain to me. Two friends, doubled fourfold by being one."

"A match-maker! Margaret, a match-maker! Since you have broached such an extraordinary subject for you, let me ask you, why may not I have the same delight?"

"I do not understand you, Lotty."

"Long ago, nay, when we were yet both at school, I built a fairy castle, in which my Margaret reigned Queen, and——"

"Go on, Lotty."

"Basil, King, dear Meg," said Lotty, in a low voice.

"Like all school-girls' castles, that was fitly knocked down, Lotty."

"Yes, for a time; but now I should like to rebuild it."

"Is this Lotty speaking to Margaret?"

"Yes, and she wishes an answer."

"How do people answer insults? How

am I? Can it indeed be Lotty, my Lotty, who gives me this wound?" and Margaret's face crimsoned, with an anger and indignation beautiful to see.

Lotty's eyes were fixed on her; her own face pale as marble.

"Do you know what love is, child?" continued Margaret, with a sort of pitying scorn.

"Yes, for you," breathed Lotty, low and soft.

"Love! where death's grim, cold clutch, is as the touch of your first child's lips, so he spares the beloved one. Love! that pervades the heart, until earth, sea, sky, and universe, seem too small to hold it. A love, that the grave so hallows, the lonely one lives on faithfulness, and requires no other food. But stay, you never loved, Lotty."

"I have a love within me," answered Lotty, "more strong than that; for life is a trifle to offer at its shrine, in comparison to what I am ready to give. Now, answer me but this one question, Margaret, then spurn your Lotty, if you will. You are now twenty-four years of

age, you have a long life before you. You are full of woman's best and sweetest virtues, more fitted than any one I ever saw for wife and mother. Say, can you doom to a desolate hearth and lonely home, a man whom you have known and liked from childhood, whose nature is so true to your own; who gave his young heart, as you know, into your keeping, until forced to tear its very life-pulse out; whose every thought is noble and good, who is bound to you by ties of cordial sympathy, and by the joint interest of your children; say, Margaret, would you refuse to marry this man?"

"Did Lord Erlscourt desire you to speak to me?" answered Margaret, in a voice so strange, so cold, Lotty looked up in wonder.

"No! oh no!" exclaimed Lotty. "Basil knows nothing, I ask for myself alone."

"I thank God, yes, I thank Thee, oh God! that he still remains the friend and brother I require. How could I doubt him?" continued Margaret, joyfully; "how could I belie, for one moment, his noble nature? But

for you, you, Lotty, who ought to have known better than even Basil himself, that if Margaret loved once, it was for ever; but in that love she cast all she had; how am I to answer you? The natural love of a mother binds me to life; the bounty and mercy of God has given me tasks to do, which leave but little time for murmurings; I am blest in the hope of executing all my Harold's wishes, leaving his name untarnished and his children beloved. I am twice gifted in having the affections of those around me, and bestowing on them in return, all the love I have left. I say in the morning, 'Praise God;' and at night I whisper my prayer of thanksgiving, for a contented heart, a cheerful spirit. I go about the world, I enter with pleasure into all that interests others. Yet, Lotty,—

"'*Neither the angels that live in Heaven above,*
Or the demons down under the sea,
Can ever dissever my soul from the soul'

of my Harold. You are answered. Farewell!"

Margaret turned away, her fair face flushed and excited, her step and air like a mourning, injured queen; but already the inspired eyes looked up into the viewless air, and ere Lotty lost sight of her, the fair fingers laced themselves together; Margaret was in spirit, communing with her Harold.

"She will forgive me soon," murmured Lotty; "she will guess her Lotty had a motive." And she went and sat down in one of the quaint old summer-houses, which commanded a view of the path Margaret had taken. Bear showed no sort of sympathy with Lotty's silent mood, but gambolled about in high gusto, as if all the world were charmed with each other, and no breeze had heard the first words of estrangement between Margaret and Lotty.

A soft, hurried light was in Lotty's eyes, and a smile came to her lips, as she heard the words, "Lotty! Lotty!" rising on the air. Margaret had not been gone half-an-hour, after taking that leave of Lotty, almost as it were, for ever, and here she was flying back with swift foot-fall, calling on her urgently.

Lotty came forward, slowly and shyly. But the instant Margaret saw her, she ran to her, and lifting up the little blushing face, kissed it again and again, saying, "I wondered, and was so hurt, so vexed, and I cried bitterly, and I said, 'that Lotty should think thus of me, Lotty who loves me so.' Then came her words ringing into my memory, as if pealed from the boughs above me; 'I have a love within me, more strong than yours, for life is a trifle to offer at its shrine, in comparison to what I am ready to give.' I believe it. Thank God! Lotty, I need not the sacrifice. Now you know this, you feel it—nay, turn not away, but bless your Margaret, by saying you are happy."

"I am happy."

"I know all now," said Margaret, going on; "everything is plain, that was so enigmatical before. But, Lotty, dearest, most unselfish, most matchless Lotty, now my castle will be built, my dream will come true; your Margaret's only wish will be gratified. But when may I speak openly? I feel sure you

have been a cruel, remorseless, unfeeling Lotty, and you must be brought to reason immediately."

"Now don't, Meg; how could I think you would be so silly?"

"I like to be silly—I will be so. Ah, Bear! your day is over. Do not fancy you are the best-beloved—"

"No!" interrupted Lotty, hastily. "Bear knows that Lotty is silly enough to like an unkind Margaret the best."

"I will not be unkind. No, Bear; for the first and last time, Margaret and Lotty have misunderstood each other; and time is too precious for me to suffer a moment of estrangement now. Who knows how soon I may lose her? Who can tell what changes a day may bring forth? As the miser hoards his gold, as the prisoner cherishes the fresh air, so must I hold and love my treasure while she is mine."

"I will never leave you, if you wish it, Queen Meg."

"Perhaps I may demand the sacrifice; but wait until I do."

CHAPTER XVII.

So the fourteenth of February came again.

"My Lotty, are you not early? the clock has only just struck six," said the sleepy Margaret, as Lotty rose to take her morning's walk.

"Good-night, then, and go to sleep again," answered Lotty; "because, Bear," continued she, when in her dressing-room, "we must get out of the way, and hide ourselves. It won't do for us to go and meet anybody this morning—we must be there first."

But somebody seemed to know with whom he had to deal. For, again, as Lotty passed out in the dark morning, did she hear the words, low and tender:

"Is this my Lotty?"

Bear gave a short, deep tone of recognition and delight, a mode of expression he never indulged in but on extraordinary occasions. But there was no other sound.

"Is this my Lotty?" again was heard, in accents this time troubled and sad.

A little hand was put into Basil's; he clasped it with a force that almost crushed it into nothing, and, with a cry of irresistible happiness, drew the slight form, for one brief moment, close to his heart. Then, with one arm round her, he bore her swiftly to the cedar walk. There, on that Valentine's Day, before even the birds were awake to settle their own betrothments, words of love and vows of constancy had been given and exchanged; and the sun broke out in high refulgence, as if to ratify the contract with his bright presence.

Margaret had not followed Lotty's advice, and turned to sleep again. On the contrary, she also rose early, and, as the lovers crossed the lawn from the cedar walk, they saw her sweet face anxiously watching from the break-

fast-room window. They could see her happy start, they knew she disappeared only to meet them at the garden-door, and, ere they thought she could be there, she was out, shawlless and bonnetless, but glowing with so much delight, she heeded not the keen February air.

"My Lotty!—dear Basil!—tell me quickly, am I to associate evermore two such loved names as one?"

"I have caught her at last, Margaret; but, unless I have your help, she may escape me yet; she is the most wilful—"

"Dearest, sweetest, best Lotty in the world," interrupted Margaret.

"I grant it, she is all that, and much more, and I will tell her so, as soon as ever she has told you she loves me. I must have a witness, Margaret; and until you hear her say it, I am not sure of her."

"You must give her time, Basil."

"Time, dear Margaret! I asked her to marry me two years ago, and she has never vouchsafed me a civil word or kind look since. Judge if I have not reason to be alarmed."

All this time, it was beautiful to see Margaret caressing and fondling the little, blushing, shy thing, and most wonderful to behold the glowing delight of Basil, expressed in his radiant eyes and smiles. But Lotty would say nothing he required. She said, "Bear loved him, and she did not dislike him;" and with that he was forced to be content.

So now Margaret took Lotty up stairs, that she might take off her walking things, and prepare for breakfast; and she hovered about her, and waited upon her, as a nurse waits upon the petted child.

"Two years!—how could you be so cruel, Lotty?"

"I did not know—I could not tell—I have been very unhappy," murmured Lotty.

"Ah, my best one, all for me! How lucky it was that I was so hurt and angry. Then you must have been convinced. But turn, Lotty, look at me with your dear, most truthful eyes. Confess to your Margaret that now you know what love is. Now you can feel that all she said was the living, naked truth. Once

love truly, 'tis love for ever. Now comfort your Margaret by saying you feel and know it; then she will forgive herself for ever being cross to her Lotty, or misunderstanding her."

"I feel, I know it," whispered Lotty, blushing and trembling, and then trying to look defiant and indifferent.

"Of all the things that could happen to me in this world, nothing ever pleased me more, or could benefit me so much. Don't you see, Lotty, you have now given me a real brother? Now I may make use of Basil's services twice as much again as I have lately done, because, you know, Lotty, the world is such a strange one—so rude, so far from generous."

"There is the breakfast-bell, Queen Meg."

They went down together, and, as they opened the door, Basil met them. Lady Montagu and Miss Rachel were also in the room. Without the smallest preparation, but with the greatest coolness, and, as Lotty afterwards said, "impudence," Basil at once took her hand, and leading her up to the two ladies, said, "Allow me to introduce to you my future

wife. I am obliged to do this," continued he, apologetically, "not only because I am impatient for all the world to congratulate me on my happiness, but I wish it to be as publicly known as possible, that she may not retract"

They were quite as much charmed as he meant them to be, and in the state of excitement into which they all fell, breakfast ran great danger of being utterly forgotten.

"But I cannot think, Basil, why you have been so cold and indifferent to her all this time," said Lady Montagu, "telling me, as you do, how long you have loved her."

"I was obeying her wishes, as I supposed. She had a purpose in her heart, and I had one in mine. We each took our own methods of fulfilling our secret wishes, and I certainly think I have shortened my probation by the excessive care I took to show I was indifferent to her. Now, my Lotty, confess, the more I was a wretch and hypocrite, the more you thanked and loved me?"

"You will upset the cream-jug, if you are so fidgetty," was all Lotty's answer.

"Margaret, have you any message to Rose Leigh? I must run across for a private business of my own."

"Now, Basil," began Lotty.

"What, my Lotty?" answered he, turning his beaming, smiling eyes upon her, and enjoying her confusion. "Nay, you must let me be the bearer of my own good news. You have had your way for two years; give me this one day, and you shall have two years more."

"A bargain," said Lotty.

"We will seal it," answered he, "on a fitting occasion."

As Basil entered the drawing-room at Rose-Leigh, every one of the inmates exclaimed, as they looked at him.

"What good news do you bring us?" said Lady Katherine.

"Dear, dear!—what charming thing has happened?" said Pru.

"He is going to be married," cried John Grey; and to add force to his words, down went his hand with such hearty good will on the table, that all the cups, saucers, spoons and forks, skipped up in indignation.

"Nothing but matrimony could make him look thus; I did just the same, my Pru-Pru."

"He does look happy," said Lady Katherine; "but I hope he is not going to be married; we cannot spare him to a stranger."

"It is not a stranger," said Basil, more radiant than ever.

"Mrs. Leigh," exclaimed John Grey; and down went the hand on the table again, and the forks and spoons skipped higher than before.

"Lotty, sweet, dear, darling Lotty! say it is Lotty, and none will rejoice as we do."

Of course, they must instantly start off to kiss and bless her.

"Wait for your wrapper, mamma," urged Pru.

"Stay thou, my Pru-Pru., until I procure your clogs," commanded John Grey.

"I must go at once to bless the darling child," exclaimed Lady Katherine.

"My sweet, darling Lotty!" said Pru., half crying, half laughing.

But Margaret knew what they would wish,

and had anticipated them. There she was in the door-way, and behind they caught a glimpse of a little figure. How she was kissed, congratulated, and blessed. How they wondered and rejoiced, and chattered : leading one to imagine that Lotty had been born for no other purpose than to marry Lord Erlscourt, and that the whole world had leagued themselves in terrible array, for months and years, to prevent the marriage. But that he, with the courage and fortitude of the celebrated young man in the Arabian Nights, had surmounted time, difficulties, and troubles, as great as his, in the journey to the unknown islands of Wak-Wak, and like him, had rescued and recovered his winged and beautiful bride.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"I WISH to know, Basil, how you came to think of loving me?" asked Lotty.

"I wish to know, my Lotty, how I could help it?" said Basil, in return.

"But you knew very little of me before; that is, you know, you had so many other things on which to bestow your attention, I never imagined you had any for me."

"I am sorry to make myself out such a hypocrite then, for I do not think I ever missed a word you said, or anything you did. I am too happy now to tell you what I endured, when I heard of that hasty marriage, for I then found out that I was not smitten with your prettiness, or your sweet wilful ways;

but that I had reckoned upon trying to win the affections that would be to me the true and only panacea for my early disappointment."

"Ah, don't be too sure; you cannot think how wicked I can be, if I choose."

"Be as wicked as you like, I shall only be too glad to punish you, and I shall be very glad if you will give me a specimen now, as I have a punishment all ready, which I am dying to inflict."

"Nay, tell me the punishment first."

"I should carry you off to church, and marry you on the spot."

"That is too severe. I am sure Flo. would pity me, if again I had no opportunity of being married in a grand dress, and having a trousseau."

"Do you know, my Lotty, I feel for once in my life pleased with, and grateful to Mrs. Bankes. The alternative between her offer and mine, I imagine, gave me a favourable lift, at a time I most required it, for you are so wilful, my Lotty."

"I see no wilfulness in my wish not to

burden you with a wife, whom, perhaps, after a year's marriage, you would have discovered you did not love as you loved before."

"Come, now, that is a very wicked speech; you must be punished."

"Bear, Bear!" cried Lotty, struggling from his grasp.

"It is of no use your calling Bear, for he has been my confidant these two years, and gave his consent long before you did."

"I won't submit to be kissed in the public road, whenever you choose."

"Then I will wait until we get into Mrs. Laird's drawing-room, for punished you must be."

Lotty, however, gained the victory; for, instead of following him into the drawing-room, she was up the stairs and out of sight, before he could catch her.

Mrs. Laird, upon hearing the news, sat down and cried like a child, which she said was all for joy.

Then they all adjourned to Court Leigh, and there the business of the day began.

Lotty was to receive her presents, and read innumerable letters, while many more had to be written, so that Basil grew very impatient at all this monopolizing of his Lotty.

When the dinner-hour approached, Mr. and Mrs. Laird appeared—she in brilliant satin and Limerick lace cap, and he in his best apparel, with his wig put on quite straight, to do honour to the day.

"My bairn, what hae ye gotten in that bonnie box?" said Mrs. Laird, as she took her wrapper off, in Lotty's room.

"Lord Erlscourt's birthday present, ma'am, to me."

"And whatna a sort of present is it, my bonnie bairn?" said Mrs. Laird, eagerly.

"I have not looked at it yet?"

"Ech me, to hear that noo! For any sake open it, and let me see, bairn."

Lotty drew forth a long necklace of golden links, that matched her bracelets; but like dew-drops on a hot summer's night, lay a lustrous diamond on each link.

"Ech me, but yon man's a princely giver!

My word, but them's matchless, bairn, and sae just fitting for you!"

The little, small, white throat, gleamed with sparkling beauty, for Mrs. Laird insisted on her wearing it, this one night. And as they looked at and admired the way in which the bright circlet set off Lotty's fairy beauty, Mrs. Laird whispered to my Lord:

"I dinna think, my Laird, ye hae matched her eyes, yet."

"I quite agree with you," said he in return.

* * * *

The state of commotion into which the Beauvillian line fell, was wonderful. This was a proper match for their girl, it should be celebrated as such a marriage deserved.

The settlements offered by Lord Erlscourt were munificent; what they meant to give back in return, should be proportionate. But above all things in the world, one thing pleased them—their girl looked radiantly happy, and she had whispered in her brother Norman's ear, that

she loved at last. Nothing should mar the celebration of this wedding, at all events. It was to take place at the village church of Beau Court. Her eldest brother charged himself with all the arrangements and expenses thereof, while other brothers took other duties, and uncles and cousins came in to help. And while all these events were occurring, and the whole country in a commotion, there sat in a little back street in London, in a little dingy parlour, a lady—that is, she did not look much like a lady, for she was in a dressing-gown, with disordered hair, slippers down at heel, and what appeared to be an unwashed face; and she was warming herself by the fire, seated in anything but an elegant attitude, and reading the newspaper, with anything but amiable feelings.

"Humph! here is our old gentleman appointed one of the governors of the Bank of England, and yet he suffers a son like Fred. to live in such odious lodgings, with half the pittance we ought to have, because we got a little into debt. It is all very well Fred. say-

ing that he helped us three times, and that he won't sit and listen to me abusing his father, —but he shall hear my mind. I am not going to be drowned by any of them. I have made him suffer pretty well for not allowing me that new bonnet; though, to be sure, I have found it very dull moping here all by myself of an evening. But it is no fault of mine. He said I should not have the bonnet, because his father would think his promises of retrenchment false, if he saw me going about with such a handsome thing—and so it was, a love, and so becoming. And I said he should have no dinner until I had it. No more he shall, here. He may go and dine on a miserable mutton-chop in the city, for I have taken good care he shall not have above a shillingin his pocket when he goes out, that I may be able to tell his nasty, stingy, old father, that I am economical, at all events. Jupiter Ammon! what do I see in the court news—

"'Lord Erlscourt about to lead to the hymeneal altar the beautiful Mrs. Leigh, of High Leigh, Cheshire.'

"The little, sly, unkind thing! never to tell me, or to say one word. Or I wonder, has she cut Margaret out. Dear me! perhaps it is a mistake. No! it cannot be; they say, early in May, the marriage takes place. I will write to her—to be sure I will; I will offer my services to select her trousseau. This time it will be a fitting one, I hope. I will write her such a letter, that she cannot help asking me to the wedding. Then I must have that bonnet to go there. I will send a note into the city to Fred., to say he may come to dinner—poor fellow! I long to talk over the news with him. I will send out now and get him a nice beefsteak, and a slice of cod, to be ready by half-past six, with some scolloped oysters. Won't he enjoy it?"

Mrs. Bankes did all she intended, and welcomed dear Fred. very warmly. But she was disappointed in seeing him enjoy the feast she had prepared for him. He hardly tasted a mouthful of fish, he said it was so woolly; and he turned up his nose at the beefsteak—there was no Worcester sauce to it; and the

scolloped oysters had no cayenne pepper in them.

"Why, Fred., after dining on nothing in the city for the last three days, I certainly thought you would have been grateful for this nice feast that I had prepared for you."

"I did not dine in the city."

"Good Heavens! I hope you have not been running up a bill at some club."

"No, of course not; I always dined with my father."

We will draw a veil over Mrs. Bankes's discomfiture.

No wonder "dear Fred." could eat nothing at home.

Père Bankes was celebrated even in London for his French cook.

CHAPTER XIX.

Gerald, at Lotty's request, was to marry them. But Basil said he must have John Grey to "assist," because, without regarding the fashion, as it now seemed to be, he deemed it would certainly require the offices of two clergymen to bind such a little myth, such a wilful, wayward thing, in the bands of holy matrimony.

"But," said John Grey, "I have heard a strange story, a word missed—or rather not heard—it is thought, unuttered in the marriage service; I give due notice, unless I hear every syllable distinct and plain, I shut my book, and—"

"Make yourself very disagreeable," retorted Lotty.

"I shall do it," said the good John, his eyes twinkling, "as sure as I love my Pru.-Pru."

"There is an idea running loose about the world, which ventures to insinuate you love Lady Katherine more than Pru.-Pru."

"An idea I glory in," laughed he. "I must away to tell it to my Pru.-Pru."

Lotty duly received Mrs. Bankes's letter, and returned for answer, that she was much obliged for all her kind congratulations and offers of assistance. But she was sure Flo. would be glad to hear she was having a very proper and correct trousseau prepared for her; and believed that this time she should certainly be married in a wedding-dress. Nevertheless, she took no notice of the broad hint, purporting Mrs. Bankes's ready acceptance of an invitation to the interesting ceremony.

So Mrs. Bankes wrote again; and this time pointedly expressed her ardent wish to be present, on an occasion so peculiarly trying

to her dearest and ever-beloved Lotty; and wound up with a list of the various talents she could bring to bear, so as to render her presence both agreeable and highly convenient. Whereupon Lotty returned for answer, that she had no power to give any invitations, and recommended Flo. to comfort herself with the reflection, that it must necessarily be a very indifferent sort of an affair, because of her having been married before. No white gloves, no white dress, no favours, not even bride-cake. She was sure she was doing a kind act, sparing Flo. the infliction of witnessing such a mutilated ceremony, &c., &c.

But the good Beauvillians were not at all disposed to be inhospitable on such an occasion, and had already settled that every single individual who had ever had a liking, or glimpse, or interest in "their girl" should be invited, even if all her schoolfellows chose to be of the number. They had room enough and to spare among the numerous kindred; and accordingly upon Mrs. Frank fell the lot to invite

not only Mr. and Mrs. Bankes, but Mr. and Mrs. Royston.

When Carry first received the invitation, a little clause had been somewhat advisedly inserted in the letter. "So large an assemblage was expected, Mrs. Frank was much afraid she had no room to spare for children; in fact, if possible, (she must beg them to excuse her apparent inhospitality through the urgency of the peculiar circumstance), she would be greatly obliged if they brought but one servant."

No children! For the first time in her life since she had been a mother, was such a proposal made to her. Of course she could not go. The grandest wedding in the world would not tempt her to leave her darlings.

"I wish you would accept it, Carry, dear," said her husband, with an eagerness rather unusual in him.

"What! can you leave your horses and dogs?" demanded she.

"Yes, Carry, I have taken a great fancy to go, and you will oblige me much by accepting

the invitation. I can assure you, it is a sad life I lead, going about from place to place, as if I was a bachelor, and had neither wife nor children."

Carry's heart smote her, as she heard these unwonted tones from her rough 'squire.

"I will accept; and then if any of the children should be ill, or likely to fret, you can take my excuses."

"Thank you, Carry, for conceding so much," answered he, rewarding her after his own boisterous fashion.

Perhaps 'Squire Royston would not have succeeded in his wishes, but for a letter Carry received from Flo., as follows:—

"My dear Caroline,

"Of course you have heard of the splendid match my dear Lotty is about to make. The ceremony is to take place after Easter, on the 23rd of April, and I am extremely busy preparing all my little matters. For, of course, dearest Lotty insists on my attending the wedding, which, however incon-

venient, I could not deny her. You may rely upon my sending you every particular; I shall make a point of writing to you immediately after the ceremony, which you may be sure shall lose nothing in *éclât* from my presence. I hear that all the world are asked, and every house in the neighbourhood is to be crammed—but, of course, I shall be near the bride, in fact, under the same roof. I suppose you will not leave the darling children, otherwise, I dare say, I could get you an invitation. However, be assured I will not forget you, and remain ever, your affectionate schoolfellow and friend,

"Florentia Bankes."

Flo. always signed herself thus, when on "stilts," as Lotty termed her grand moods.

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Mr. Royston, indignantly, after reading the letter, "if that is not the most impudent—" but perhaps it is as well to leave to the imagination all the 'squire said. "Now, Carry, if you don't go, after reading that letter, I—I'll—yes, I will;

that is, I shall have to go and horsewhip Bankes."

"Oh, dear Robert, be calm, he might call you out—there might be a duel; if my poor children should be fatherless—"

"Come, don't cry; as regards my fatherly attentions, they won't miss much, but that is your own fault, Carry. I am not allowed to touch my children, lest I should crack 'em or damage 'em."

"I think I will certainly accompany you now, Robert; that is, if all the darlings remain well."

"I devoutly hope they will, then; and I'll tell you what I'll do. As we are only to take one servant, that will be your maid, of course, and I will leave my man, Bendeth, to ride every morning to the station, and telegraph down how the young pups are."

"Pups!"

"Children, I mean, Carry; what a great ass I am."

"Oh! thank you, dear Robert—how thoughtful and kind of you. Certainly, I promise to

go now. I like Flo.'s impertinence, indeed; Lotty was quite as partial to me as to her."

"She is not what I take her to be, if she is not a deal more fond of you. That Mrs. Bankes is—" but again we pause.

So the important day came; they were invited to appear on the 20th, that they might have three days' enjoyment of Lotty's society before-hand.

Lucky it was for the 'squire, that they were soon puffing away on the railroad; for the first half hour, Carry was very tearful, and had she been in an ordinary carriage with horses, might have turned back. But he ensconced her safely in a first-class, and was so attentive, and endeavoured to make himself so agreeable, that having a really tender heart, Carry could not but dry up her tears and be comforted, out of very gratitude for such unwonted exertions on the 'squire's part.

By and bye, the excitement of the journey, the freedom from maternal anxieties, the number of miles that were now inevitably placed between her and her darlings, had their due

effect, and she began to smile and enjoy herself quite like the Carry of bridal days.

"I say, Carry, I never told you what I did, my last trip to town. I know you seldom think of yourself, so I went to your milliners, and ordered you a few nice dresses and head-gear, and such like. Of course, I did not venture to use my own taste, but I told Mrs. Atkins, if you liked them, and looked nice in them, I would pay her bill within the month; but if she palmed off any of her trash on me, she might whistle for her money for the next two years. That's the way I serve my tailor, Carry."

"Oh, Robert, how kind you are. Why, I always thought you cared for nothing but horses and dogs."

"Humph! Well, I am rather given that way; but still, does it not strike you, Carry, that a change comes over one now and then? I don't think I can pass all my life in the dog and horse line, eh, Carry?"

"No, Robert, I should hope not."

"And yet, Carry, when I do stop at home, what happens?"

Carry blushed, and was uneasy.

"Never mind, I don't want to upbraid. If you are pretty happy this visit, perhaps you and I may come to some sort of a bargain for the future, and each give way a little. But here is Swindon—now what will you have?"

"Nothing, thank you."

"Then I'll go and see after the luggage, and get a glass of wine for myself."

He, however, soon came back, his handkerchief almost concealing his face, while he indulged in hearty, but suppressed laughing.

"They are here, Carry, in the train with us. By the Lord Harry! I would not miss her seeing you at Gloucester for a mint of money; keep close, Carry, we will have a Siddonian scene then. It was so lucky she is such a chatterpie. I was just going into the refreshment room, when I heard her haranguing poor 'Fred.' Such a wigging as she gave him, for leaving her exposed to the gaze of the multitude. She had brought a maid with her—it

was her business to look after the luggage, not his. Heaven help that poor little mannikin! he is properly henpecked."

The 'squire was so tickled with the idea of what was to come, that he had not ceased laughing when they arrived. Carry having the advantage of fore-knowledge, was fully prepared for the interview at Gloucester station; but Flo.'s start and exclamation fully answered Mr. Royston's expectations.

"My heavens, Carry! what are you doing here?"

"I am on my way to Lotty's wedding," answered Carry, composedly.

"And who asked you?" exclaimed Flo., with an effort, endeavouring to hide her discomfiture.

"The same person that asked you—Mrs. Frank Beauvilliers. I thought it useless to answer your letter, as I should have the pleasure of seeing you soon," continued Carry, with spirit.

Flo. was for once silenced and put down. But not for long.

"Flo.," said Mr. Bankes, "how many boxes have you?"

"Five," she answered.

"Then one has gone to Exeter; it was all your fault——"

"Gracious heavens, Frederick! then you must go instantly after it! How dare you be so careless and good-for-nothing!" continued she, turning to the unfortunate maid.

"I will do nothing of the sort," answered Fred.; "we will telegraph, if you like; but as it was all your own doing, I'll thank you to scold no more."

Snubbed by Fred., what further indignity was she to suffer?

* * * * *

They had a very kind welcome from Mrs. Frank, and a truly Beauvillian one from Mr. Frank, and in a genial glow of half-bustle and half-happiness, they were hurried up-stairs to dress and prepare for an evening party. Mr. and Mrs. Frank were "at home" that night to all the Beauvilliers.

If ever there was a fresh, clean, beautiful, well-ordered, well appointed house, it was Mr. and Mrs. Frank's. Bright, blazing fires, neat-handed, swift-footed, smiling little handmaids, beautiful toilette appointments, green-painted spacious baths, and a general pervading scent of freshness and lavender, put every one into a high state of comfort and delight.

Flo. had recovered her assurance, and being promised her missing box by the next day, was in high good humour.

"Really," said she to 'dear Fred.' "I must go and see what Carry is about to wear. I cannot have her disgrace herself and us, by any thing dowdy. Luckily I have brought more than I shall want, and can lend her a head-dress."

But the amount of finery spread out in all its glory on Carry's bed, sent her back tamed and subdued for the evening.

"Think of Mr. Royston making her such magnificent presents, and she knowing nothing about it, my dear Fred., until she opened the box; and I never gave the man credit for a

morsel of taste. A silk dress, Fred., *couleur D'Abricot*, with such black lace flounces, and pomegranates for the hair, and a blue *moire*. Oh, Fred. Fred.! just the dress I am dying for, and the most beautiful brocade for the wedding-day. Well, one comfort is, however handsome Carry's dress, she must look a dowdy, she is such a figure. Law! before I'd be so fat—There! I declare that must be a carriage at the door—make haste; of all things I like to watch the company being ushered in; it is such a good time to look over their dresses."

There was a goodly assemblage of the Beauvillian family, and a very fine set they were to look at, but out of compliment to Lord Erlscourt, the whole of his family were asked to Beau-court, and were now being ushered in, under the strict surveillance of Mrs. Bankes.

"I suppose that is my lady," whispered she to Carry, who looked very pretty and nice, in her blue *moire*, rather to Flo.'s astonishment, and highly to the 'Squire's delight and admiration. "Well, I don't think much of her. She may have been handsome, but is quite *passée;*

bless me! there's my Lord as deferential to her, as if she was his own mother.

"Oh, Flo! what handsome girls those are! I declare I think they must be the Miss Erles, and so prettily dressed. Coral looks so well with white muslin."

"My dear, I suppose they must be the Miss Erles, they look just like gipsies—"

"Oh! Flo., that must be Margaret, see the beautiful head half turned away. Now we shall see, dear, dear Lotty."

"My Heavens! if there is not that old Scotchwoman, with a gown and cap more staring than ever."

"Do you think, Flo., that nice-looking, lady-like person, talking so happily to the gentleman in black, is—"

"Why, it is Miss Leigh that was. How matrimony has improved her."

"Mrs. Frank's sister, no wonder she is nice then. I never saw a person I liked so much, and Robert is in such admiration of their house, and to-morrow I am to see the twins." Carry paused and sighed.

Luckily the 'Squire passed by, and took the opportunity of whispering, "You look twenty per cent. prettier than she does." The *she* was indicated by a look,

"Here are the Erle boys; dear me! what fine, handsome young men they are grown. And see, there are dear Lotty and Margaret, too, they are coming towards us."

"How lovely Margaret looks," exclaimed Carry.

"Black velvet is always becoming," responded Flo., "but I declare Lotty looks like a little child, in that white muslin frock, and clinging so to Margaret."

Their school-fellows now greeted them, and Mr. Royston observed with much pleasure, and no little pride, that both Lotty and Margaret told Carry they thought it very kind of her to come, as they knew she must feel a great deal at leaving her children. Also in the course of the evening, he observed that Lord Erlscourt asked her to dance, a favour he did not grant Flo. And further, he overheard Brian remarking to Hugh,—

"I did not know Mrs. Royston, did you?"

"No, she looks as young again, without that horrid baby."

The next day they were all expected at Beau-Court, and the company mustered more than ever. Lotty's trousseau was to be displayed; settlements to be signed, and various little matters to be done, that are always requisite on the eve of a wedding. The number of Mrs. Beauvilliers' appeared to be continually on the increase, until it became a hopeless matter to distinguish which was which.

Lotty seemed to cling still closer to Margaret; and though again in her simple white frock, an expression, half-awe, half-fear, wholly sweet and tender, took from her face the childish look, and told but too truly that a woman's heart dwelt beneath. In a few hours she would have to promise vows, a love to last until death, a compact that only the grave would dissolve. To that little, faithful, truthful, magnanimous heart, this was no light task. Life or death could offer no more solemn act.

Margaret had laid aside her usual black

robes, for this evening and the morrow. A full, flowing robe of silver grey swept its graceful folds around her; a few delicate, white roses clustered in the dark hair, and falling in long wreaths upon her fair neck, added such a queenly beauty to her appearance, that the spectators gazed only to gaze again, for fear the lovely vision might be seen no more.

Lady Katherine rustled about in a silk that would have stood of itself, without her upright and stately old figure to support it.

Mrs. Laird's satin was certainly gorgeous, and if she had procured another for the ceremony of the next day, green spectacles would be required to endure the blaze. Mrs. Royston looked even prettier than the night before, in the *couleur D'Abricot*, and black lace flounces. It was Mrs. Bankes who looked the dowdy, thought the 'Squire. The Miss Erles were handsomer than ever, in flowing white tarlatan, looped up with moss roses.

But as for describing all the company, and all their dresses, and all they said and did, only the able pen of the chronicler of the

celebrated marriage of Sir Charles and Lady Grandison can do that, and only in the days of novels nine volumes long, could such minute particulars be given. A full and particular account of the *trousseau* might be given; but then so varied, so different, so wonderful are people's tastes, such a description might incur a great deal of censure.

The sight of it was, however, properly appreciated by those who did see it; and none showed their sense of such a favour, in a more pointed and particular manner than Mrs. Bankes. She gazed at everything, touched all the silks, examined all the flowers, inspected the laces, counted the gloves and handkerchiefs, passed her opinion upon the whole; and, after a long and eloquent dissertation upon *trousseaux* in general, and this one in particular, and the shock she had endured when she had learned that Lotty's first marriage had been concluded without this indispensable and never-ought-to-be-omitted marriage article, and highly necessary part of the ceremony; she was now bound to confess that

the omission had been amply repaired—in fact, it was a wonder how so small a thing could require so vast a wardrobe. However, Lotty had nothing to do with that, and had only selected out of all the things presented for her choice, a habit: Mrs. Bankes, not knowing this, of course gave Lotty credit for exquisite taste and judgment; but, properly speaking, the praise all belonged to the Beauvillians. The evening was further remarkable for the presentation of innumerable quantities of presents, which it would be endless to mention here.

However, a glad smile was seen stealing over the little, pale, somewhat anxious, face of the bride as Bear appeared, and with infinite delicacy both of touch and judgment, as befitted such a gentleman, he laid on her lap a small parcel. Outside, it was directed "for Lotty," and a furtive glance at Brian, showed that Lotty recognised his handwriting. Inside was written "Bear's present," and the writing this time made Lotty glance at Hugh.

Certainly Bear had shewn great taste in his

present: they were bracelets, consisting of two rows of single pearls, and on the clasp of one was a tiny likeness of such a handsome face, with fair curls and speaking eyes, that seemed to say, whichever way she turned them, "I love you, Lotty."

Brian and Hugh underwent a pantomimic act of self-congratulation, as they saw Lotty's brilliant blush of pleasure, and the quick, shy way in which she concealed her treasure; on the other was a most amiable, but canine visage, with deep, loving eyes it is true, but they only said, "I am Bear, what do you want with me?" Lotty kissed this portrait openly, and then kissed Bear, and said, "Go and thank them for me, Bear." Which Bear tried to do; but Brian and Hugh would have no thanks by proxy. Said they to Bear, "We will wait until to-morrow, then Basil has given us leave—ah! you know what, don't you, old fellow!" Then Queen Margaret put her present into Lotty's hand; and it was a necklace to match the bracelets, but the clasp was deep blue enamel, with five large pearls

confidingly resting on the bright surface, as if they were aware how the royal colour showed off their matchless form and hue; but Margaret touched a little spring—the blue sea, with its fair freight, disappeared, and there was a fairer pearl within—the lovely, loving face of Margaret.

Ah! Lotty was pleased, and she almost rose from her seat, and looked round for Basil, that he might join in her delight. He was close by, and his fair curls mixed with her dark ones, as she whispered her pleasure at that, and something else hidden in her hand—the honest face of Bear was permitted to lie exposed to every eye.

"Ask Margaret to show you a present she has had to-day," said Basil.

Margaret smilingly unclasped a brooch, something like the clasp of Lotty's necklace, and touching a spring as before, a bewitching little, well-known face, with the curls all rumpled, as if the fingers had been running through them, with dazzling, glorious eyes,

looking as if they said, "My Queen Margaret." Lotty beheld herself.

"How could you have it taken without my knowing?" she said, blushing at its beauty, and laughing at Margaret's pleasure.

"It was copied from the picture your poor father had taken of you, just before you went to school."

"Then that makes it so childish-looking," said Lotty.

"It is exactly like my Lotty at present, only her hair is perhaps in better curl."

"Curl indeed!" said Lotty, beginning to look saucy, and then becoming more shy than ever.

"So Mrs. Bankes did get here, after all, Margaret," said Basil, for he found it ineffectual to provoke Lotty any further.

"Yes, Pro. was so kind as to ask her, and really, Basil, upon the whole, she has been very good this evening; and as for Carry, she is as nice as possible."

CHAPTER XX.

For twenty miles and more round Beau Court, no one sat still on this eve of the twenty-third of April, and it was supposed that few went to bed that night, for fear they should be too late in the morning. Everybody was to be at church by eleven o'clock; but previous to that, Lord Erlscourt had sent up to enquire of the numerous hand-maidens, if he might be permitted a few moments' conversation with his bride. If all the reports of her appearance in her bridal dress were true, it was, indeed, only judicious that he should see her, ere he met her at the altar. Every fresh person who came flying down the stairs, declared that never had such an exquisite little

bride been seen before. Basil entered Lotty's presence for the first time, on the morning so eventful to them both, as a bridegroom should.

Serious and subdued in manner, as if he knew God was about to bestow on him one of his best, fairest, noblest gifts, yet did a serene joy beam from his eyes. He knew full well that no light words were spoken between them ; and while he could hardly restrain his happiness, that at last he had not only gained the little wild thing to be his own sweet wife for ever, but that her heart was wholly and entirely placed in his keeping, yet did he know one little regret, one sad thought afflicted her—she was no longer to be all in all to her Margaret. It was true, that her marriage gave Margaret the greatest happiness she could now know ; but such was Lotty's love for her, one word of regret spoken, would have proved that their love passed all other ; and this word even Basil would have forgiven, for Margaret's sake.

Certainly none of the partial judges of

Lotty in her wedding-dress had overrated her appearance. Basil could have knelt down to admire the exquisite little figure, the lovely, blushing, innocent child-face—

"A rosebud
Set with little wilful thorns,
And sweet as English air could make her."

Her dress was of white lace, purest, finest, most valuable Brussels. That, all the Beauvillians had taken care should be the case. But, as she was not to be wholly in white, beneath she wore a silk slip of a pale pink, that shone through the folds of the lace dress like a blush rose. Round her slight throat gleamed the diamond necklace, on her arms the two matchless bracelets. Over those rich luxuriant curls was a long, floating, gossamer veil, of such beauty and fineness, that it was fortunate for Lotty a curl or two strayed out of its place, to assist the veil in hiding her face from Basil's delighted gaze. But the "little wilful thorns" showed themselves.

"Don't, Basil; I will not have you stare so

at me." And the little, tiny, satined foot made a sort of faint attempt to stamp.

"You may let me look a little, my Lotty, on a sight I never saw before, and may not see again; but I am glad to perceive you have your birth-day presents on, because my wedding-gift is to match them." And he showed some cases in his hand.

"This I shall keep a little while longer," he said, displaying a diamond hoop ring; "but this you can wear, my Lotty." And he gave her a brooch of diamonds to match the others. "And this, too," he continued, placing in her hands a circlet for the hair, of diamonds, so large and beautiful, that each seemed a separate star.

"Thank you, Basil," said Lotty; but letting them all fall to the ground, she continued, in a low whisper, "but you are sure you do not repent; you love me?"

"Love you! my heart's treasure, my love, my wife-so-soon-to-be!—you do not doubt it?" And he knelt down before her, with

his arms clasped round her, so that she might read his truth in his eyes.

She was satisfied apparently, for she drew her veil round her; but he could see the flush of delight that crimsoned face, neck, and arms, even down to the small fingers.

Luckily for the fate of Lotty's dress, Mrs. Beauvilliers and Mrs. Laird came in, and shrieked at Lord Erlscourt's profane touch, more full of love and delight than consideration for her toilette. So he was turned out peremptorily; and when he saw his bride again, the veil was re-adjusted, the circlet of star-like diamonds confined the rebellious curls, and, like all the rest of the numerous loving eyes, he thought a little Peri had stepped down from her airy home, "to love and be loved by him" for ever.

So the ceremony began, and even John Grey was satisfied, for the clear, flute-like notes, pronouncing the words, "love, honour, and obey," were heard at the other end of the church.

After it was over, every Beauvillian would

have deemed himself aggrieved and injured if they had not one salute from the bride; and as for Brian and Hugh, they, of course, being bridegroomsmen, had the first chance, and were not disposed to give up their claims to the stoutest Beauvillian there.

"Thank you, Lotty," said they, "that is much better than kissing Milly's baby. Now you are our sister, and we are entitled to a fair share of brotherly salutes."

"Come, boys," said Basil, "if you don't make way for us to get out of this crush, I shall stop all your privileges for a year to come. I think I had better take you up in my arms, my wife, my darling! and carry you out."

"No, no, indeed, that you shall not," said Lotty, indignantly.

Brian and Hugh proved themselves good bridegroomsmen, and by dint of their exertions, the bride and bridegroom had way made for them to their carriage. Then Basil strewed handfuls of silver, and taking advan-

tage of the rush, he placed Lotty in the carriage, and sprang in after her.

"Now," he said, clasping her close, "mine for ever."

But the joy and hilarity of everybody rose to such a pitch, and the little bride showed such fluctuating spirits, that Lord Erlscourt privately ordered his carriage round an hour before the time appointed.

As Lotty appeared in her dark-green travelling dress, her little straw bonnet, with white ribbons and violet flowers, the handsome chariot, with its four grey steeds, and smart postboys, who had all six been laying themselves up in lavender for the last month, to come out prancing and gay on this particular occasion, drove up to the door—it certainly was

"One touch to her hand,
One word in her ear;"

for, without one word, without an adieu, Basil lifted his wife into the carriage, jumped in after her, the steps were up, the door shut, the magic words, "all right!" said, and away

bounded the carriage,—with the servant clinging behind, and Bear careering his best after it, a great favour hanging over one ear—just as if they were all impelled out of sight by four express engines.

The amiable Beauvillians were dumb-struck, and only Brian and Hugh had wits remaining to throw an old shoe, for luck, after the fast receding carriage. But at least they had seen Lord Erlscourt's face, as he sat down by his darling, his bride, his wife; at all events, they had heard the tones of his voice, as he turned to her, and said,

"My wife, now my own Lotty!"

And so, feeling that they had done a good deed that day; that they had seen, by their girl's face, that she was happy; they resorted to the only thing left them, namely, to shake hands with each other, and indulge in boundless self-congratulations.

This they continued to do, without cessation, and with renewed vigour, commencing again and again, when word was passed that every-

body must prepare for dancing. So rooms were cleared, the band—or bands—sent for, gloves tried on, lamps lighted, and everything in a high state of commencement by seven or eight o'clock.

The gentle, stately Margaret was borne off in the powerful grasp of a mighty Beauvillian, and found herself flying, with resistless speed, down the long rows of a good, old-fashioned country dance.

The dignified, old Lady Katherine was in the strong hands of another Beauvillian, and was seen bobbing up and down out of all tune and place, but intensely delighted and happy.

Mrs. Laird, spite of her strict Scotch notions, found herself panting and breathless, at the bottom of forty couples, without ever having been able to bring in a word of remonstrance, at the extraordinary and wonderful position in which she was placed.

The pretty Miss Erles, one with a most devoted partner, and the dark, but still handsome-looking mother, met at all corners, all

turning of hands, and setting of partners; while, as for Brian and Hugh, they only reached the bottom of the long country dance, to bow to their late partner, and snatch a new one, and rush up to the top to begin again. Mrs. Bankes and the 'Squire, and Mr. Bankes and Mrs. Royston, were to be met everywhere; and Dr. Laird finding it impossible to keep his wig on in the respectable state of rectitude that Mrs. Laird deemed proper, had at last thrown it off altogether, and was to be seen, with rubicund face and shining bald head, in every direction. Even the little, fair, tiny twins, under the able superintendence of their delighted father, were performing a sort of extemporaneous dance of his and their concoction, in a remote corner.

After an alarming quantity of dancing, there was supper, and after supper speeches, in which every Beauvillian assured every other person, this was the happiest day of their lives; and every other person cordially agreed.

Then ensued such mutual compliments, such reciprocity of sentiments, such a chorus of

praises and interchange of good wishes, that every man supposed, and every lady, too, that they were sitting next to the dearest friend they had in the world, save and except the bride and bridegroom.

Then dancing commenced again, fast and furious. Margaret and Lady Katherine were the first to retire; but lo, it had sounded five of the clock, ere Mrs. Laird could tear herself away—in fact, she would have deemed it rank heresy to the honour of the day, had she given in sooner than any of the others. Wearily she crawled up stairs, shocked to see day-light beginning to peep through the shutters; and as she tied on a night-cap of vast frills, and long winding strings, thus she discoursed to the good doctor, who had discreetly gone to bed an hour ago; but was possessed with a vague, uneasy notion, that he had left his wig under the stairs.

"Ech, Doctor! but these are wonderful folk. They started i' the morn afore the first meal, a shaking hands, and wad ye believe it, they ar aye at it the noo, at this awfu' hour of

night, or if I spak God's truth, the morn o' anither day; what wi dancing, jigging, and shaking honds, I am amaist dune. I ne'er thought to gang on i' this fashion at ony time of my life, least ways the noo, and me just o' the stroke o' three score. But they wadna be refused; one was aye o' the floor, jigging awa wi ane of them stout fine auld gentlemen, and no to hear a word of 'will ye, nill ye.' Aye me; thon's a snore, and the Doctor's no minding me, he's just fast like ony baby, and nae wonder. More betoken I kenned he was a bit unsteady, and there's nae doubt but he has a hail bottle under his belt. And hoo I am to ca' shame on him i' the morn is past ma kenning, for deed it was nae mair nor respectful and proper of him, to glorify the day."

CHAPTER THE LAST.

Carry was sitting by her fire, also prepared for bed, about the same hour that Mrs. Laird delivered the last sentiment ; she was far from tired or sleepy—on the contrary, deeply buried in thought, when Flo. burst into the room.

"It is shameful, the way in which Fred. behaves ! he will not come to bed, though I am as tired as a dog ; and just as I get into a nice sleep, he will be rattling up, making such a noise ;—but what are you sitting here for, instead of getting into bed ?"

"I am waiting to rub Robert's shoulder ; we could not bring his man, and ever since his accident, the doctor ordered it to be rubbed with White's oils."

"Mighty conjugal, indeed! he might have let you off this one night."

"Of course he would; but he has been so kind to me, I wait at my own wish"

"Well, I do hope, Carry, you will regard what I tell you, and think less of your babies and more of him."

Carry smiled.

"A man that can go and give his wife, in one day, four or five beautiful dresses, and scores of other things besides, is not to be despised; mark my words, Carry."

"Flo., I smiled to think of your ever having given me such advice—I don't remember it. But I wished to speak to you. The last three days have made me think more than I ever did before, Flo."

"It is high time you should begin to regard something besides those brats."

"Do you notice Mrs. Frank, with those darling little twins, Flo.?"

"I must allow they are very pretty, nice, little, well-behaved children."

"Do you see how she puts their papa for-

ward in everything, making them love and respect him as the first of human beings, though he is so distractedly fond of them ?"

" He would spoil them past everything, but for her, Carry ; it is lucky she has no more— I don't think he would have eyes for any other child."

" True, and that shows how judicious she is. Do you remember how we laughed at and despised the poor Misses Leigh, for being odd old maids ? and now how different they are."

" Fred. said he never saw such a well-managed house as Mr. Frank's ; and did you taste the curry ?—even Pierre could make nothing like it."

" And to see Mr. Grey with his wife ; no wonder, Flo., I sit here and think."

" Well, live and learn, Carry. I am delighted to find that, at last, you take counsel by me."

" I beg your pardon, Flo.," answered Carry, with spirit ; " so far from taking your counsel, I have been calling to mind a conversation I once had with you. Do you remember the avenue at Court Leigh ? You and I were there,

and poor Augusta. Ah, Flo ! whenever I think of that fine, handsome girl, and her sad fate, I cannot but weep."

"Very ridiculous of you ! she fully deserved it."

"Why, Flo., I have been thinking you and I have not conducted ourselves much better."

"Speak for yourself, if you please," answered Flo., in high indignation.

"Then I say this: on that day on which we walked up and down the avenue, you compared Augusta, yourself, and me with Millicent, Margaret, and Lotty. I agreed with you in thinking, not only that they were sadly to be pitied, but owed much of their fate to their own folly. And we all three agreed, poor Augusta, you, and I, that we would not change places with them ; and now, Flo., within these three days, within this hour, I have been wishing I was even as good as Mrs. Frank."

"And a very proper thing, too," interrupted Flo.

"Augusta died a horrible death," continued Carry; "and you, Flo., can you still say you are better than the three school-fellows we

despised? Do you think your husband loves you as he ought? or that he will continue to pay you even due respect—(pray don't be impatient with me)—if you go on in your present habits? All his family dislike you, and think you are the real cause of the troubles he has fallen into; and you know, Flo., there is more truth in that—"

"And, pray, what do you think of your own precious self?" interrupted Flo., in her hottest mood.

"I shall have nothing to say for myself, if I do not take timely warning. Indeed, I shudder when I reflect that, but for this visit, but for Lotty's fortunate wedding, my eyes might never have been opened, I might have alienated dear Robert for ever."

"Truly, a most wonderful loss—"

"Do not be angry, Flo.; I feel sure you must reflect, when we compare our situations now. Millicent, as ever, retains a place in the estimation of all who know her, that none can envy her, she so truly deserves it. And Lotty, Flo.—"

"Lotty was always unlike any one else," allowed Flo., rather pettishly.

"What a vast amount of love have we seen poured out upon our little child school-fellow! so spontaneously bestowed, does it not speak and say, 'None more worthy?' But, Margaret!—ah, Flo.! who can look at her, and not wish to be better? With a stricken look in her eyes, with her heart half in heaven, how she still treads the earth among us, our queen and head. Her grief is not selfish, though so great, for how gently does she interest herself in all our concerns. She said I was very good to come, and leave my children; and, smiling, added, that I should be pleased to see the difference a few days made in them. No advice, Flo., no hints, but this little remark, to remove (I know she thought) any pain I might have for doing so. And you, Flo., when Mr. Bankes was complaining yesterday of the long time you kept him waiting, she spoke for you as one sister would speak of another, and your husband listened, and thought kindly of you then, Flo., for none can gainsay the saint-like

Margaret. Though she has lost her Harold, and will carry to her grave a riven heart, yet who would not wish to be her? And as that cannot be, Flo., it seems next best to me that we should begin a good deed on Lotty's wedding-day, with God's help—a deed that Lotty will herself love and foster. It is, so to act, that we may prove worthy to have been

MARGARET'S BRIDESMAIDS."

THE END.

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